Titanomachy

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Titanomachy

by Anonymous

Summary

In which Techno ends up in the Attack on Titan universe, confuses a lot a people, kills a lot of titans, does a bunch of dumb shit, and would really just like a bowl of soup please.

Levi is along for the ride.

(I'm writing this on a very shitty impulse)

Notes

What the fuck have I created

See the end of the work for more notes

- Translation into Русский available: Титаномахия by RaccoonEatsPies

Chapter 1

Techno was just trying to eat soup. It was some damn good soup, by the way. He made the broth from scratch, had farmed the vegetables and hunted the meat himself, had labored over the fire for hours just to make this soup. Needless to say, he was excited to actually eat the soup.

Techno set down a wooden bowl filled with the steaming soup and coupled it with a hunk of fresh bread. He sat down at his table, his armour clunking lightly against the chair. Listen, he has had to deal with multiple attempts on his life. He never knew when he would need to slap a bitch.

He reached for his spoon and dipped it into the broth. He brought it to his mouth, a smile on his lips. But, before the soup could meet his lips the world *shifted*.

In a flash of blinding light, he was no longer in his kitchen.

A gentle breeze ruffled his hair. Sunlight warmed his face and soft spring grass tickled his cheeks. He was lying on his back.

Techno sat up in the closest thing he had to a panic.

He was sitting in a large prairie. Vibrant grass littered with patches of flowers stretched on in every direction. The sky was a breathtaking blue. Not a cloud in sight. The sun shone warmly in the clear sky.

Now, Techno knew many things. Perks of living so long. With the endless stream of time before and behind him he gained quite a bit of knowledge. He knew cruelty, he knew battle, he knew death. He did not, however, know where the hell he was.

He looked down to the spoon in his hands. When he sat up the soup got flinged out. Frantically, he looked around for his bowl. It was nowhere to be found.

His- *His soup.*

The spoon in his hand splintered and snapped.

Oh he was going to make whoever did this *pay.*

Before he could successfully plan out a murder, the ground beneath him trembled.

He flipped around. What on earth? As if his day couldn't get any fucking weirder, it appeared that a giant, naked man was running at him. It's eyes were far too big, it's chin jutting into a narrow point. It had unnaturally long legs and a potbellied stomach.

What. The. Fuck.

The thing continued its charge, not pausing for Techno's internal crisis.

The giant had reached him now. An enlarged hand reached towards him, surprisingly fast for it's large size. The fingers closed around his form. In a flash, Techno drew his sword and cut the fingers cleanly off. Blood erupted from the appendages and surrounded him in a crimson wreath. His sword was sheathed again before the monster even knew what happened.

It pulled back with a roar. Techno watched with curiosity as steam poured from the wound and the fingers started regenerating.

The thing recovered quickly. It grabbed at him again with renewed vigor.

Techno dodged. He took a powerful jump and launched himself onto the monster's arm and ran up it until he reached the torso. With the thing's enlarged proportions he could easily see where the ribs fell, and jabbed his sword between them. Not that he would have needed to, judging by how his netherite sword cut through the flesh like butter.

In a quick motion he plunged the sword deeper, ignoring the heat and steam, and ripping the blade sideways. He greeted the sight of blood spray with a smile. He had severed the heart from the blood

vessels.

When he pulled his sword out however, the monster did not collapse like he hoped. He watched with horror as the would-be lethal wound closed. The monster looked down at him and he met its eye. There was nothing to be found in them, no intelligence, no emotion, nothing. A beast, not human beyond its appearance.

Techno felt like the Gods facing the Titans.

Another hand swatted at him. He dodged with ease.

He dug his sword into the titan's toreso and used it as leverage to vault himself up the beast. Then in the air, he came back down and carved the titan's skull in two. He dropped back to the ground. The titan crashed down behind him.

He sighed as it rose again. A chant rose steadily in the back of his head.

Blood for the Blood God.

Feet came crashing down around him. He danced nimbly between them. He cut the achilles tendons. He wasn't coming back up to it. Techno was going to bring it to him. The titan collapsed to the ground. In second he had torn across the vulnerable flesh, shredding the titan's muscle and sinew. He left deep gashes, red, bleeding canyons across the titan's body.

The titan had already started picking himself up.

With an exceptionally fast hand, the thing managed to grab Techno. It brought him right to its mouth.

The chant in his head worsened.

Blood for the Blood God!

Before the titan could drop him into his gaping maw, Techno cut himself free. In a single swift motion, he severed the titan's jaw from it's face.

This thing thought it could kill him. It forgot one thing

Hungry, vicious voices sang.

Blood for the Blood God

The titans had fought the gods, and they had lost.

Blood for the Blood God

Imprisoned for eternity.

Blood for the Blood God

Technoblade would not be so merciful

Techno limped through the thick shrubbery. He braced himself against a giant tree. What was it with this place and oversized things?

He stumbled. Techno was exhausted. He and the titan had fought for what seemed like a never ending stream of time. He brought out his axe sometime during the fight. Eventually, with a vicious swing and a good deal of luck he sliced a chunk out of the titan's nape. It fell to the ground and this time, it did not rise. The massive body started burning and disintegrating away. Techno stood over the corpse, drenched in blood that was not his own, victorious.

The blood also evaporated, much to the voices displeasure and his relief. He didn't know where he would find a place to wash his clothes.

After the fight, he headed for the only landmark he could see on the seemingly infinite prairie: A large forest.

As he made his way to the trees he encountered many more titans. While still dangerous, now that he knew their weak spot he disposed of them quickly.

Techno tripped again. Victory was not without a cost. He was absolutely exhausted and he had hurt his ankle in a botched landing.

The sun had long since set. Techno had seen more titans while in the forest, but it seemed that they went down with the sun. Now under the light of the pale moon, they were inactive, almost asleep.

Techno leaned against the tree. He was so tired. And hungry now that he thought about it. He missed his soup.

He was grateful for the reprieve from the monsters, but he knew it would not last. He looked up at the tree. It was tall, far more so than even the largest titan's he had seen. With a sigh, he dug a blade into the wood, then using his axe he did the same. Using them like anchors, he began his climb. It was grueling, even for him, but he managed.

Once he reached what he deemed to be a satisfactory height, he flopped down onto a branch.

He stared straight up, past the canopy and to the sparkling night sky. He couldn't name any of the constellations. They were all unfamiliar.

Staring at the stars, he came to a decision. He would survive. Techno had survived Dream, had survived Pogtopia, Manburg, l'Manburg, the Butcher Army, everything. Not only that, he had fought and won. He would not die here, he would not lose.

Technoblade never dies.

Not then, not now, not ever.

The first few weeks were the hardest. Finding a source of food and water was a nightmare. Food was arguably the easiest, he was a born hunter. Sure, he usually hunted *people,* but a rabbit or two was practically second nature to him. He hunted mostly at night, he didn't have to worry about the titans then, and, to his surprise, he didn't have to worry about any monsters either. There were no zombies, no skeletons, nothing. He also found a nice squash patch and even a couple bushes of blackberries and elderberries. The berries were full and sweet on their vines. So yeah, food was covered.

Water, however, was a problem. It took him two solid days to find any. When he finally found a sparkling, clear lake, he nearly cried. He immediately drank to his heart's content. He also took time to wash his greasy hair and his cape. His long, pink locks were knotted and filled with dirt and his cloak had already started fraying. It was built sturdy, but he had been battling giants, now even the thick fabric had gained its share of holes. The crimson of the fabric had been buried under a layer of dirt, making it a deep brown instead of red.

With that situated he came to his latest issue, shelter. He slept in the trees but it didn't protect him from rain or wind. Techno was never much of a builder, he usually let Phil handle that stuff, but he knew it had to be done. After a couple days of hard word, he had a 'home'. He had carved slightly into the tree, not so much as to kill it, but enough to give him a little overhang. Then, he had set up wooden spokes made from whittled down branches and created a rickety roof. He tied it together with scraps of his cloak. He had cut it to waist length after it had become evident the ankle length cape hindered him in titan combat.

With all that taken care of, he had come to a routine. Collect food and water at night, sleep until noon, then spend the rest of the day traversing the forest and killing titans. Work, sleep, kill. Not much different than what he usually did. Pretty much the same in fact, just upping the size.

And so, he continued his routine. Doing what he needed to survive.

There was a broken blade. Silver and gleaming in the moonlight. It was wrapped in a tangle of morning glories, the white flowers curled into tight buds under the stars.

Techno leaned down to observe it. There was no rust. The blade was relatively new.

Someone had made this. Someone had lost this. Someone was out there.

He was not alone.

A titan was pawing at the base of his tree.

He looked down at it. He was tired, he didn't want to deal with this.

His shelter shook, a stick coming loose. Techno pinched the bridge of his nose. Now he was just annoyed.

There was no longer a titan pawing at his tree.

After the blade, he kept finding things. A boot, a couple of forest green cloaks -which he sewed into a blanket- a metal wire, a buckle strap.

Most were pretty normal, pretty tame, others though were morbid. A cracked skull, a broken femur, a deteriorating arm. Once he found an entire horse skeleton covered in broken tack. The voices hissed at those. Whenever he found a remnant of the dead, he made sure plenty of titans joined them. It wasn't that he was unused to death, it was that he knew how they died. Consumed by mindless monsters. No one deserved that.

He continued to survive in their place. He would not become a cracked skull or nameless body. No one would find his netherite sword wrapped in flowers.

He would survive.

Combat against titans was difficult. He needed to get up their nape from way down on the ground. It was hard. That wasn't to say he was bad at it. No, he could launch himself up a titan in seconds with a good vault from his sword. That, or he could ground them.

Problem was, there was hardly ever only one titan. Facing multiple was a challenge.

He developed a strategy. He would start high. Up in the trees. Then, he would drop down and land on a titan. He would take it out, and as it fell, leap to the next titan, then the next, then the next. The trick was the momentum. You couldn't stop, you had to fling yourself from body to body as quickly as you could or you would already be too far down to get to the nape of the next one.

It was difficult. But he had time to practice. Once mastered, it took out hordes of titans in minutes.

Techno walked across the branches in the canopy. Sunlight filtered through layers of forest green leaves, casting the landscape in a warm green glow. Pure, yellow sunlight found its way to the branches in patches, streaking the dark understory with beams of fierce light.

"What do you think, Chat?" he asked, "Rabbit again today, or should we go for something else?"

Ew, no more rabbit

Bunnyblade

E

E

You need food to survive? Cringe.

Rabbit!

Titan

Who cares about food get back to the murder

/rainbowchat

Simple, don't eat.

E

Guys he needs to eat, actually answer the question

Boo boring stream

eat a titan. thats like a lot of meat right

He can't eat a titan dumbass they disintegrate

Blood for the blood god

Kill titans!

E

Go eat a bird or something, you sad, sad man.

ugh propper punctuation cringe

Techno sighed, this is what he got for asking chat for help. Unfortunately, his only social interaction came from these days. If you could even call it that.

"Guess I'll have rabbit again." he shrugged.

Nooooo I want soup

God soup sounds so good

E

I had some soup today, vry good

Stfu why do you guys care so much about soup

Better question, why dont you?

mmmmmmmmm soup

I want soup plz

He sighed again, "Me too chat, me too."

That night, Technoblade had a slightly burnt rabbit for dinner. He really missed his soup.

His armour wasn't super helpful against titans. Sure, it protected his ribs on the odd occasion a titan got it's grubby hands on him, but it really just weighed him down.

Techno rubbed a gentle thumb across a netherite pauldron. The metal was cool against his skin. It soothed him in a strange way. He loved his armour, he loved everything he created. It was . . . *nice* to be able to make something instead of destroying it.

The armor had kept him safe from so many things, so many people. It had kept him alive at the end of the day, it held him and protected him. There were not many things that did that for him. In combat against humans, his armor did the job well, but against titans?

He clutched the pauldron tightly in his hands. He should leave it 'home' but he just couldn't bring himself to. With a sigh, he fixed the netherite to his shoulder.

He would keep it on. His armor was part of him. He didn't feel comfortable without it.

It had been months.

Techno stood at the center of a circle of disintegrating bodies, drenched in steaming blood. It was a swarm.

Technoblade never dies. It was a fact.

He flicked the blood off his blade. He frowned.

But, the titans never seemed to end. They had come to an impasse. When could he rest?

The sound of footsteps shook him from his thoughts.

A fifteen meter lumbered towards him.

The voices chanted. Who was he to deny them?

It was over in a flash.

"I was thinking about trying out knitting," Technoblade admitted to the empty air.

Knitting pog

How tf would you knit out here. You have no yarn no needles no nothing

Oooooooo make a pig

Blood for the blood god

Why knitting

Techno played with a strand of his hair. It was getting really rough and gross. Maybe he should cut it.

"I don't know," he said, "It might be good to pick up a hobby of some sorts to help with the boredom."

Why knit when you could kill shit

Blood for the god, skulls for the skull throne, milk for the cornflakes. Where in that does it say knitting?

Guys don't be mean. He's lonely and bored

Imagine being lonely couldn't be me

Nerd

Y'all you're literally watching a youtube stream. You cannot talk about being lonely

You're here too

I never claimed i wasn't in the same boat

Touche

You don't have the stuff to knit, maybe try something else?

Tehcno paused. That actually made sense. But what could he really do. All he had was a couple of weapons and armour.

"What about whittling?" he suggested.

This time the response from chat was positive

Techno now knew that titan flesh tasted like soured human flesh.

Do *not* ask him how he knew either of those things.

Little curls of wood fell to his lap. Techno's hands were broad and clumsy. They were meant to destroy, they weren't made for the delicate work of carving wood. Still, he tried.

His first works were not more than lumpy blocks of wood. What was meant to be a vague human figure turned out as a spiky lump of rough edges and cut fingertips. He was very, very bad at this. He did it anyway. It was something to do, something that actually made him happy in this hellscape.

He guided his knife through the wood. His fingers were bandaged and bleeding. He was better now, he only cut himself once or twice per work now. Wood split and curled under the edge of his blade. He cut up the block of wood and curved inwards as he went, ending the cut with a flick outwards.

Today he was trying to carve a little sheep. It could fit snugly in his palm. He had carved out the main body, which was really just a blob with four thin protrusions downwards for legs. Now he was onto the hard part, the head. He wanted it to have ears. Just two little flat edges attached to a sphere. It sounded easy, but was the source of endless headaches.

Another curl of wood fell to his lap.

He dug his knife into the wood again, pushing the blade away from him. Near the end, the blade caught. He frowned and pushed harder. It didn't move. He added more pressure. Nothing. More. The blade came loose in an instant, sliding forward with a jolt.

"Ow!"

He stuck his thumb in his mouth, a metallic taste spreading across his tongue.

After a few seconds, he took the finger out and resumed his carving.

Fifteen minutes later, he placed a little wooden sheep in the nook of his tree, right alongside a little carved rabbit, a bird, and a horse.

He found an entire human skeleton today. It's clothes had all but disappeared with the passage of time. Now all that clung to the bones was a few loose scraps of fabric.

How long had these people been fighting the titans? How long had they been dying to them?

He killed a deer today. It was too easy. The animals in the forest had very little fear of humans, probably because hardly, if ever, saw them.

He processed the corpse and dined on thick slabs of venison that night. The rest of the body he processed and put to use. The bones - after he ate the marrow - he used to make needles, fish hooks,

knives, all sorts of things. The organs he either disposed of or ate. The hide he set aside to be tanned. He could use it as a tarp for his home or a blanket.

He saw a weird titan today. It didn't attack him at first. It just hid behind trees and watched him from afar. He saw something in it's sunken eyes. Intelligence. Incredibly rudimentary intelligence, but intelligence nonetheless.

He was intrigued. This betrayed everything he knew about their species.

But, like always, when he ventured to close, the titan tried to eat him.

He killed it. A shame, really.

He finally met them on a sunny day.

He was on the outskirts of the forest. He wasn't fighting for titans for once. Instead, he was enjoying a handful of plump blackberries. The juice dripped from his mouth and stained his sticky hands purple. He enjoyed sweets. It wasn't soup, but it was still good.

That was when he heard the hoofbeats.

The blackberries rolled out of his hands. He was up in an instant. Hoofbeats. Hoofbeats! The people from the forest! They were here! They were actually here!

Techno had never run so fast in his life. In less than a minute he was right on the edge of the forest. There, not even a hundred metres from his forest, was a caravan of people. They were riding on wagons and horses. Titans swarmed to them like hyenas to a carcass.

Techno descended the tree and raced towards them.

Eld thought he was going to die. He had survived numerous expeditions, killed so many titans, seen so many things, and he was going to die. Here, right here. He was going to die. The titan got lucky, snatching him out of the air just as he finished off a ten meter. Now, clutched in the titan's hand, his arms pinned uselessly to his side, his teammates preoccupied with their own battles, he knew what would happen. The entire caravan was swarmed. Eld knew. He was going to die.

The titan brought him closer and closer to it's drooling mouth.

He closed his eyes tight and braced for the pain.

Except, it didn't come.

Eld heard a choked off roar, and then his stomach flipped as the titan began to fall. The fingers around him loosened, and suddenly, his arm was slinged over a shoulder and he was being carried away.

They landed with a heavy thud on one of the wagons.

He snapped open his eyes to look at his savior.

"Captain Levi-" he started but cut himself off.

It wasn't Levi, they were far too tall for that. It wasn't even a member of the Levi Squad. Instead, he was met with the sight of a tall, well built man. Dirt and blood was smudged over fair skin. Thin, golden earrings dangled from his ears, one was accented by a sliver of emerald. Long, pink hair cascaded over the man's back, and his gaze was held by scarlet eyes.

"Hullo," he said. Their voice was surprisingly deep.

"Who are you?" Eld asked breathlessly. His legs wobbled beneath him, still shaken from his almost death.

The man scratched his cheek, "I was uh, going to ask you that."

He didn't know? Their green cloaks should be a dead giveaway. In fact, never mind the cloaks, only the scouts are crazy enough to go outside the walls. Who else would they be?

"We're the scouts," Eld offered.

The man blinked, but did not say anything. He looked considerate, but confused. When it became apparent that he would not continue the conversation, Eld took it upon himself to.

"You saved me," Eld stated dumbly.

"I guess I did." he mumbled.

Eld looked them up and down. They were clothed in well worn boots, dark pants, a white shirt and cravat. A red, waist length cloak hung over his figure. Black, obsidian armour covered his body. Everything was covered in a thick layer of dirt. Levi would've thrown a fit.

"Where's your ODM gear?" Eld exclaimed.

The man's brow furrowed, "My what now?"

"You're ODM gear!" Eld shouted.

"You saying it louder does not tell me what it is."

Eld was dumbfounded, "How did you kill the titan?"

The man shifted from one foot to the other, "I used my sword to climb up it."

Eld blinked, "You used your sword."

He shrugged, "Sometimes my axe too."

Eld opened his mouth to speak. He had so many questions. Who was this man? Where did he come from? How did he kill titans? How long had he been out here? Why didn't he know who they were? He was able to ask none of them, as a large foot came crashing down.

"We'll talk later." Between one second and the next, the man was gone. Eld watched in amazement as the mysterious figure scaled up the massive titan and cut it's nape clean off.

Oh, *that's* how he does it.

They slid down the falling titan, and ran to the next, taking it out with just as much ease.

It was a frankly inhuman display of strength.

Before Eld could sit and ponder any of what just happened he was thrown right back into the battle.

There were titan's everywhere. It was a swarm like Technoblade had never seen before.

On the bright side, there were people everywhere. Real, living, breathing people. He had a conversation with one. The first conversations he had had with anyone - no, the voices do not count- in so long.

On the bad side, more people meant more people dying.

Techno wasn't going to let that happen. He tore through the ranks of titans with new urgency. He was a whirlwind of flashing netherite and steaming blood. The voices weren't satisfied. They wanted more. More carnage, more blood, more death. For once, they didn't wish it on people. It was nice to have an outlet for a change.

He heard a scream. He turned around just to see a young woman get lowered into the jaws of a nine meter. With a loud crunch, it bit her in half. Blood dripped down the titan's chin and stained it's hands like blackberry juice.

Technoblade was a calm man. He really was. If you set aside the homicidal voices in his head, he was an easy going guy.

He was not right now.

Angry.

He was angry.

The voices shrieked. His blade sang.

"The hell?"

Levi zipped away from the falling titan corpse. He was about to kill it when . . . whatever that was happened.

It was a blur of pink, red and glistening black. Whatever- *whoever* it was was tearing through titans like they were nothing but tissue paper.

Levi landed on his horse. Hange was practically vibrating besides him.

"Levi! Levi! Did you see that!" They shouted with glee.

"I would be blind not to."

"Who are they? Where did they come from!? Levi, Levi! Look, he's like you! Fast! So fast!" Hange grinned, "Their hair is pink! Do you think they dyed it? Is it natural?! I've never seen a dye that potent, but there's no way pink could be a natural hair color! Right? Right?"

Levi just sighed.

Erwin rode up beside them, "Whoever it is, they're holding off the horde. I'm calling a retreat while we still have the chance. Levi, get your squad together. We're getting out of here."

Levi nodded. They could ponder over the mystery man later. For now, they had to survive.

Techno's skin was burning. Titan blood was hot, hot as the summer sun or the kiss of flame. It singed and seared his skin. His eyes stung as the blood worked its way down his face and into the vulnerable organs. Red met red, iris and steaming ichor. A stench of burning iron hung in the air, stale rust and vintage furnaces. His blade was no longer the gleaming black of netherite, instead it had taken on the scarlet hue of battle. He flew through the air accompanied by fresh arterial spray. Sunlight made spilt blood shine like rubies, gems so fine they could fit on a king's crown. Flowers were lit aflame from the burning bodies Techno left in his wake. Emerald grass blackened and burned wherever the battle took him. In the midst of the smoke, blood, and violence, was Techno.

His sword and axe tore through another nape out of countless. He fell to the ground, jamming his axe into the now limp corpse to slow his fall.

He was hurt. His side ached and burned. *Probably a broken rib,* he thought with displeasure.

He stuck his landing on the ground. A jolt of pain shot up his spine. *Scratch that,* he scowled, *two ribs.*

Techno was fast, but not always fast enough.

More titan's closed in around him. At the start of the battle he fought alongside others. Their weird cables allowing them to fly a bird. They wore the symbol of wings on their backs. Techno found it fitting. Now, however, they were nowhere to be found. The sound of hoofbeats had long faded into the background, naught but a countermelody to the thunderous clash of his battle.

They had retreated. They had left.

Techno didn't blame them. They were hemorrhaging soldiers and bleeding their ranks dry.

Still it stung. Months for him to see another human, and now he would be alone. He could still see the rising dust from their retreating form on the horizon, but they were far away now. Even with all his prowess, he could not keep up with a galloping horse. He would be alone, with no more information about these people than a name. Scouts.

It made him . . . . upset.

The remaining titans descended upon him. The voices in his head were still in uproar, the ranks he had lain to rest still not satisfying them.

Techno clutched his weapons tighter. He would not retreat. He would fight.

To the death.

The voices chanted.

Blood for the Blood God.

They called to be satisfied.

Blood for the Blood God.

Their thirst to be quenched.

"Blood for the Blood God." he said to the empty air, to the voices, the titans, the world.

Technoblade never dies.

Techno slammed a fist against a tree. Fury simmered beneath his skin.

He was no longer in the sun lit prairie. Now, in the dark forest under the light of the stars his anger bloomed like a moonflower.

The voices had not quieted, they continued their roar no matter how many he killed. The voices were hard to manage when he was *calm,* they could drive a saint insane. When he was calm, he could keep damages to a minimum, when he was calm he could manage it. He was not

calm.

The sun had long since dipped below the horizon, the gentle moon sending his titan adversaries to sleep. When in the chaos of battle the voices were bearable, but now, in the quiet night, the full force of their craving crashed down on him like a tidal wave.

Techno pressed his back against the rough bark and slid down to the ground. His head fell to his knees, his fingers clutching his scalp and twisting themselves into the knotted locks, searching for something to ground him. He wanted to scream, to cry, to do something. It didn't hit him until the battle was over. He had been in this hellscape for months. He finally found others, and then they were gone. He was alone again, and would be for who knows how long!

The last time he got well and truly mad he had destroyed a country. For heaven's sake! The tamest thing he had done while mad was massacre a battalion of soldiers!

The voices cried for blood. The titans did not satisfy them. He wanted more than just blood, he wanted suffering, he wanted pain! He had tried to get it. He tried all he could. He had ripped the eyes from the monsters, filletted one from it's shoulders to it's hips, decapitated them slowly and waited until it was regenerated, then started again. Nothing helped.

There was no suffering. They were nothing but dumb beasts. Beyond the initial pain, the torture did nothing to them. Their eyes were glassy with lack of intellect. They would regenerate whatever he did to them, then be right back at trying to eat him.

His hands itched for blood that didn't evaporate. He longed for sweet screams from those who could comprehend what he was doing. He wished for humans. *Oh* , why did he have to let those Scouts slip by. He could have heard them sing for him. He could have bathed in their blood, could've drank in the sweet taste of death, could've-

He punched himself across the face. *This was not him* , he tried to remind himself in a voice that sounded vaguely like Phil. *This wasn't Technoblade. Techno liked leather bound books with well worn spines, Techno liked cooking for others, Techno liked freshly fallen snow, the crackle of fire, taking care of the horses.*

He was right. He was all those things.

But,

But he was wrong.

Techno was violence and bloodshed. He was death and sorrow. Techno liked burning down villages, Techno liked coating ornate thrones in hot blood, Techno liked the smell of gunpowder and the sound of war.

That wasn't him , the Not-Phil voice said, *that was what the voices made him.*

But it was. It, and the voices, were a part of him.

Techno curled in around himself.

Maybe the Scouts were right for leaving him out here. He belonged with the titans. He deserved to stay where he was. Right alongside his fellow monsters.

"Are you sure?" Commander Erwin asked.

"Yes sir," Eld replied, "The man appeared to have no idea of who we were. When I asked him who he was he only asked me the same question. When I told him that we were the scouts, he showed no outward display of understanding."

"And you're confident that he was not using any ODM gear or anything remotely similar to it?" The commander pressed.

Captain Levi placed a hand on Erwin's shoulder, "Oi, leave him alone. His claim has already been verified by multiple other soldiers."

Erwin leaned back in his chair, "This changes everything. There could be others out there. Entire civilizations beyond the walls." Erwin closed his eyes, "Tell me again, how did he kill the titans?"

"He used his sword and axe to scale up their flesh and vault himself up in the air. He would jump from titan to titan and use that to stay in the air." Eld supplied, "That kind of strength isn't natural."

Eld paused, glanced over to Levi and said, "Sorry captain."

Levi shot him a glare.

Hange burst through the door, "Isn't it incredible Erwin! He's just like Levi, but with pink hair and taller!"

Levi scowled, "I hate you."

Hange waved a dismissive hand at him, "You love me."

"Imagine," Erwin started, "an entire society of people like him. With that kind of man power we could finally have a chance against the titans."

"If there's an entire civilization out there why are we only seeing them now?" Levi pointed out, "It doesn't line up."

"You're right, there's just too many unknowns about our mystery man," Erwin agreed, "We need more information. After all, what are the scouts for? Which is why I propose for our next expedition we travel back to the forest to find out more. Any objections?"

Silence.

Erwin nodded, "Good. Then it's settled. In three months we will set out on our next expedition. Back to the forest, back to the man."

why

Chapter Summary

angst. I guess.

Chapter Notes

What the fuck? Why is this becoming an actual story.

Where is this going? Who the hell knows? Not me!

(Yes, I know my writing is shit, but gimme a break. I'm writing a dsmp and aot crossover. What did you expect?)

Techno spent the day asleep. The cruel sun was full in the sky, and yet he did not obey it's call. He usually woke to the midday sun, but today he stayed curled up in his tree hollow, the sunlight pouring through his patchwork roof in beams. Golden light dripped from the rafters like honey and found its way to his heap of blankets. The sun was warm and sweet on his skin and a gentle breeze swayed through the hollow.

In his slumber, he dreamed.

He dreamed of twisting screams. He dreamed of dead armies and slaughtered families. He dreamed of the feeling of a king's blood on his hands. When you've lived as long as Techno, dreams cease to be dreams and become a rehashing of memories so old you couldn't tell if they were real or fake.

Now, he dreamed through the smokey lens of time. He dreamed of his beginning, he dreamed of the gentle days before the voices, the soft buttercups in his hair, the kind voice of someone he couldn't remember anymore. He dreamed of all time had robbed him of.

He remembered when the sun was new and kind, when the moon was brave, not shy.

He remembered warm hands in his own, leading him to a patch of bright flowers. He remembered each of their names, red for poppy, pink for fairy trumpets, yellow for dandelion. He remembered them weaved into once brown hair. He remembered picking them from their stems. He remembered a bouquet and a smile.

He remembered grass stained red. He remembered smoke, he remembered fire, he remembered blood. He remembered voices.

He remembered himself.

The sun was trying to rouse him, to wake him from one nightmare to the next. He would not rise to it.

Only when the kind moon rose and the sky filled with the inky black of night, did he rise. Under the gentle whisper of starlight he woke from his slumber. His eyes fluttered open. Techno stared at his dark ceiling unmoving. His limbs felt all too heavy. He wanted to curl back up in his blankets and nestle back into the hard wood of his hollow. He wanted to go home. Back to his snowy cabin and pets. He missed Steve's scratchy fur and Carl's warm breath on his hands. He wanted to go back to sleep and relive it in his dreams.

But lethargy got people killed and Techno would not die. He would not.

Technoblade drew a deep breath, letting the brisk air fill his body. Then, he let it out.

He sat up from his bed and got to work. The Scouts had left, but there should still be things left on the battlefield. The more time he waited the more opportunities he lost. Clues left out there could be gone in days. All it took was one titan to step on something and it was all lost.

Techno slipped on his shirt. The fabric had worn paper thin. It reminded him of the pages from the Book of Prime. He had been to Prime churches before, he was there when the religion was started all those years ago after all. The churches were always stunning, with polished quartz floors and tall stained glass windows. Techno never found himself inclined to worship though. The only altar he prayed to was the altar of war.

Next, he fastened his armour on. Logically he knew he wouldn't need it. Titan's were - for the most part - asleep at night, but he didn't care. His armour was fairly light. It didn't cover all of his body, he wasn't a medieval knight or anything. He found that with his strength and speed it was better to have flexibility than full coverage. Besides, it was heavily enchanted netherite, it was like ten times better at protecting him than a full suit of iron could ever.

First, he slipped his breastplate on. He sucked in a tense breath as the hard metal pressed against his tender ribs. *Tough it out,* he told himself, *it's only pain.*

He attached his pauldrons. They were fairly long, stretching from his shoulder to just above his elbow in a series of plates. Then his vambraces. The dark braces had protected him from too many swords to count. After that he placed cuisses and greaves. All together his armour didn't make him much bulkier than he already was. He was fairly well built, not exactly massive, but sizable.

With all that taken care of, Techno fixed the last piece of his clothing on: His cloak. The red woolen cape fell like water over his shoulders. The dirty fur tickled his cheeks and brought a faint smile to his lips.

Techno began his descent down his tree. He had carved out footholds sometime during his first month in the forest. He was infinitely glad he did. It made scaling up and down the tree so much easier. Climbing using an axe and sword was harder than it looked. He was especially glad for the footholds now, with his ribs groaning in pain at every move.

Once his feet touched soft grass, Techno began his trek to the battle ground.

He loved it here at night. The moon cast the world in a molten silver, turning the grass to shining spears, the flowers to stars, the lakes to mirrors. Hell to heaven.

Techno waded through a thick patch of ferns, trailing his fingers through the fauna as he walked. Their soft leaves brushed against his calloused fingertips.

He walked past a sleeping titan and pointedly ignored it.

His forest was full of twisting turns and endless paths. Each tree looked somehow the exact same iand infinitely different. If you didn't know your way around you would easily get lost. Luckily,

Techno was the human GPS. He had no such troubles.

As he approached the edge of the forest the trees began to thin out. The thick foliage that thrived in the shaded forest gave way to long prairie grass. The forest opened out into a clearing, the trees curling up and out like a great big mouth, yawning out into the starlit planes.

Grass clung to his legs and he padded through the clearing. The wind blew, stirring a patch of wildflowers and filling the air with their sweet scent.

The silence of night was cut by a dull clang. Techno looked down to see a silver blade. He must've kicked it. It was from the battle yesterday.

He picked it up and held it up to the faint light of the moon. To be perfectly honest, the craftsmanship was abhorrent. The metal seemed fairly strong, but there was no care put into the sword. It seemed strong enough to fulfill its purpose but nothing more. Techno understood, supplying an army with weapons was a difficult task. You had to cut corners, even if you didn't want to. He thought back to the vault. It was stocked full of everything and more you could ever wish for in a war. Still, the netherite armor was hastily thrown together and enchanted with the bare minimum.

His eyes were drawn to the handle. It was strange. It seemed to have some sort of trigger and a lever. He pressed the triggers. Nothing happened. Curious. Moving on to the lever, he pulled it down with a firm squeeze. To his surprise, the blade popped out.

Before it could fall to the floor, he caught it, bringing it up to eyelevel to examine it. The base had a hook. Probably to hold it in the handle, he assumed.

He tilted the silver blade. His reflection caught on the polished metal. Techno frowned. He didn't look too good. His eyes were bloodshot and red and his cheeks riddled with scabbed over scratches. His hair was a mess. It was tangled and greasy and- wait was that a twig?

Techno plucked the object from his hair and flicked it away.

His eyes slid languidly over his reflection, taking in every piece and judging it. It was mostly the same as always, dirt, scabs, blood. A yellowing bruise was blooming across his right cheek.

With a snarl he crushed the blade between his fingers, the sword shattering like a mirror.

Weak.

He continued his path. From what he could see in the dark, there was some sort of wreckage in the distance.

Techno approached the rubble. A large wooden skeleton laid in rest, it's canvas flesh clinging to the bones. Large ribs poked from the body and shot like spires up into the sky. The great beast's organs tumbled out onto the ground beneath it.

He leaned down to pick at the carcass. He sifted through the wreckage. There wasn't much of use to him. It was mostly more swords and replacement tack. Weird belts and buckles. A crate was split open beside him. It was thrown from the wagon when it was destroyed. He leaned down to poke at it. The top of the crate was still attached to the rest of it. Using the tip of his axe, he pried it free. Inside was what appeared to be hard tack. Looks like it would only be more useless shit.

Tehcno had fought in too many armies to count. As general and enlisted. It was practically a hobby of his. He loved the art and brutality of war. It kept the voices quiet and kept him calm. Still, he could never get over standard rations. If he was forced to eat another brick of hardtack he would kill someone. Actually, he was pretty sure he had once. It was hard to remember sometimes.

Techno tossed the hardtack away without so much as a second thought.

He would rather starve.

He climbed his way into the wagon carcass.

Inside there were tens of weird silver tubes scattered about. He picked one up. It was a long cylindrical tube, narrowing off into a bottle neck at the top, with some sort of knob at the end. He gave the knob a twist. High pressured gas hissed out of the tube. He twisted it closed. These Scouts were so weird.

He looked around the wagon. It was just more of those silver tubes. What kind of maniac wastes wagon space for pressurized gas? Why would they even need that?

With a shrug Techno made his way out of the wagon.

His gaze raked over the carcass one more time. It was all the same, gas, straps, hardtack. A glint of light caught his eye. Under a heap of fallen gas tanks, there was some rectangular thing. Techno pushed the cylinders away, letting them roll out of the cart and onto the grass.

It was a worn leather case, with rough stitching and broken clasps.

Techno ran his hands over the smooth leather, letting his fingers slip down to the cold metal clasps. They came off with a *flick*.

Lifting the top of the case off, Techno revealed what was inside. The case was made of multiple compartments, in each was something different. There were those same blade handles, two boxes that appeared to hold multiple replacement blades, and some weird turbine things.

He had seen this stuff before. The scouts wore it. It was the thing that shot out their metal wires. The things they used to fly. The- What was it called? DMV gear? OMG gear? ODM gear? Yeah that last one sounded about right. It was the ODM gear.

Techno leaned in closer to inspect it.

On the blade boxes there was extra space on top with metal strips held aloft. They seemed to be meant to guide and hold something. At one end of the blade box was a strange metal piece that had a tube running from it. It also had what looked like a port of some kind. It looked like it was meant to have some sort of nozzle plugged into it and-

Oh. *That's* what the pressurized gas was for. It must propel those metal wires and plug into the blade box.

Techno thought back to the Scouts. The ODM gear gave them a great advantage. They didn't have to climb up a titan and tire themselves out, they could just fly. And fly they did.

Most of them had been clumsy in the air, like fledgling sparrows. Others though, others had *soared*. There was one, black haired and small, who was a peregrine in human form. He looked like he was born for the air, same as Techno was born to kill, he was born to fly.

Techno looked down at the case in his hands. ODM gear. Designed specifically to kill titans.

Well, what is Technoblade good for if not to kill?

He would be a fool to let such an opportunity slip by.

Levi looked at the moon through his window, a cup of hot tea in his hands. The glass was slightly foggy around the edges, framing the silver beauty in a ring of frost. He had tried - *Goddesses he had tried* - to get the foggy shit off, but as it turns out, it was a part of the glass and not actual grime. Still, it irritated him.

It was cold tonight. Winter was coming. It hadn't arrived yet, but fall chill had started to creep in. He gave it four months until winter hit it's crux. The Scout's still did expeditions during winter, much to his frustration, but they only did them during the beginning and the end. They generally kept December, January, and February off limits. Thank fuck.

A chilly gust spread through the room. Levi's mouth twitched down in an irritated scowl.

Much to Levi's displeasure his room had developed a draft. The cold winds rattling his windows had somehow found its way inside and were driving him borderline insane. He had already made up his mind to complain to Erwin about it.

The gust cut through the room again.

Levi shivered. He wondered how the man from the forest was faring. Scout Headquarters was a well built building, with thick stone walls and wood furnace downstairs. By comparison those woods were cold with a biting chill at night. Levi knew as he'd been there many times. The pink haired man must be freezing during a night like this.

Levi's fingers tightened around the tea.

They needed to get back out there as soon as possible. There were so many unanswered questions that they needed to ask, so many possibilities to discover and advancements to be made.

Besides, it wouldn't do if the man died to the cold before he did a titan.

It was actually pretty warm out today. The frost on the grass had already begun to thaw with the sun and turn into morning dew. Years spent ruling over a frozen wasteland - and then the world for a while but that's not important right now - had taken his perception of 'cold' and smashed it into a billion pieces. Same with his perception of heat. You didn't know true hot until you've been to the nether. Once you go there, you can't go back.

Techno's plans for the day had been simple. Figure out how to wear the ODM gear and practice using it. Said plans had immediately fallen through.

He woke up from his slumber with a jolt. He was dreaming. He couldn't quite remember what it was abou-

-Screams-

       *-burning oh **gods** why did it hurt so ba-*

  -"Help-! -

- delicate flowers, falling into -

-Fire smoke -   **- ash-**   *- bones splinterin-*

-Laughter-

*-Blood, poo **ls of blood dying the earth re-***

*-Soft ha **nds, blood st** reake **d sw** ord-*   *- "What did **you** do-?!" **death** -*

WHat dID I DO-

-"HELP ME! WHY WON'T YOU HELP?!"

Hello.

He doubled over in pain. That jolt upset his ribs. Techno had an abnormally high healing speed, but it wasn't *that* quick. It would be at least two weeks until his ribs were fully healed. Yes, he healed that fast, no, he did not know why. He didn't know a lot of things. Someone - he's long forgotten who, their face was foggy through the lens of time - once suggested it was because he had consumed so many healing items during his life that they've had a long lasting effect on his physiology. Could it be true? Maybe. Could it be complete bullshit? Also very probable.

What was he thinking about?

Oh yeah, ODM practice.

Techno ran a tender hand over his ribs. It was hot and swollen. Yeah, nope. He was not putting on that death trap of straps and high speeds today. No sir.

That didn't mean he couldn't experiment with it.

Dressing as quickly, and as gently, as he could, he hurried over to the case.

What he had currently was a loose collection of parts, straps, and nightmares, *and somehow* , he was supposed to put it together. He sighed, best get to it.

First he started with the obvious. The weird rubber tubes go to the tube shaped port in the sword handles. The gas goes into the canister shaped slot. The straps with this kind of buckle go with that kind of buckle.

To his pleasant surprise, a lot of the straps had matching stamps for where it needed to go. He guessed that even people trained with this stuff needed help. He could understand why. Still, even with the labels, the task at hand was a large and difficult one.

Forty-five minutes and a headache later, the set was put together.

He picked up one of the swords. First he pulled the lever down. The same thing as before happened. The blade dislodged. He moved on to the other parts of the handle. His fingers hovered over the two triggers. Last time he tried this, nothing happened, but he was willing to bet whoever designed the ODM gear didn't put them in for aesthetic design.

Cautiously he pulled the top trigger.

In a hiss of steam and explosive speed, a metal grapple was shot from the the side of the blade box and embedded itself deep in his wall.

Okay. Holy shit. Yeah.

Wow.

He looked down to the second trigger. Did he even want to risk it?

As it happens, Techno is a colossal dumbass, so he risked it.

In a jarring thrust, the ODM gear - and Techno with it - was yanked with frightening speed straight into the wall.

Techno groaned.

His ribs.

A good cry later Techno was back in business.

From what he had, ahem, *observed,* the hilt of the sword was incredibly important. This led directly into Techno's next issue: the blade itself. Not to sound rude or pompous, but the Scout's blades, frankly, sucked. He would be caught dead using them. No seriously, he would probably die if he used them. Yeah yeah, 'only a bad craftsman blames his tools' and all that, but he was not going to let himself get eaten because a shitty blade broke when he had a perfectly good netherite one.

And an axe. Did he mention the axe?

Anyways, he put so much Gods damn time into *Orphan Obliterator* and he was going to use it. End of discussion.

This brought him back around to the whole needing to use the hilt to actually use the ODM gear thing. If he wouldn't use their sword and he needed the hilt then he would just have to combine the two. Techno wasn't the best at making things, but he'd made enough weapons during his lifetime to arm a country. He could handle this.

One dissected hilt later he was wondering if he could handle this.

How the fuck was he supposed to connect this to his sword if he didn't even have a furnace? There was no way he could meld the two together with a normal fire!

He banged his head against a wall.

"f⹀⹀ᕐᗷᐧᑊ ᑊᒍᐧ ᛏᒪᐧᛁᛁᐧ," he hissed.

Pain shot through his head with the uproar of the voices.

Technoswear

Family friendly channel my ass

Ha get demonetized nerd

Wait Techno can swear?

What you thought he was incapable of it?

I dont know maybe!

Fucking dumbass

Wanna say that again you fucking peice of sh-

"Oh shut it. You can't even speak ender!" he shouted.

Okay so as it turns out the hilts were made of a metal with a pretty low melting point. He actually could just stick em in a fire and glue them to his sword and axe.

How did he find this out?

Uh, he *might* have gotten frustrated and um, may have thrown them in an open flame.

But he was going to ignore that because now he had functioning ODM compliant weapons! Heck yeah!

Techno dreamed again.

He was standing in a field of sunshine yellow dandelions. The kind sun held him close and wrapped him in it's warmth. The air smelled sweet and soft and the gentle wind rustled the grass.

A small hand slotted into his own.

Techno looked down. A small child was holding his hand. Their hand was soft against his calloused palm. They didn't look at him, they only looked straight ahead with a grim set expression on their face. He thought they were quite cute, with ruddy cheeks and fluffy brown hair.

A drop of rain landed on his forehead. He took a hand and whipped it away. His fingers came away red.

What?

All around him droplets of blood fell from heaven to earth. Techno looked to the boy. Their rosy cheeks were now smudged with blood, and their right hand held an iron sword. Blood dripped from the blade and pooled on the yellow flowers below and dyed them red.

The boy's hair was pink.

Techno shot up from his bed with a gasp, his hands grasping at the blankets. He was drenched in a cold sweat.

Only the sound of ragged panting filled the night.

Chat tried to console him and comfort him.

He held up a shaking hand, "Not now," he croaked, "Please not right now."

For once, they listened.

Listen, Techno knew he was supposed to be resting so his ribs could, y'know, heal. However, he just couldn't stay still. Once his weapons were finished he found himself with a great lack of things to do. He couldn't really go out and murder titans anymore and he couldn't practice with the odm gear so he was sort of stuck.

The first few days he practiced his carving. He carved a blocky creeper, what was supposed to be a cat, a buck - which he had to redo numerous times because he just *couldn't stop breaking the antlers* - and a lopsided peregrine falcon. He was heaps better at carving than before, but he had quickly tired of it. He was bored. Like super bored. All he did all day was sit in a tree and carve wood.

He was Technoblade, bringer of death, Blood God, the Blade, war incarnate. He wasn't some- *some woodland fairy!*

So, despite what he should do, Techno decided to do some work. He could feel it in the air, the onset of autumn. He knew the trees - the ones that weren't evergreens - would begin to change their color and food would become plentiful before it became scarce. He needed to prepare for the harsh winter if he was to survive out here.

The first thing he did was find a way to make a form of non-perishable food. He thought back to the box of hardtack he left out in the prairie. Techno was not stupid, he'd lived this long afterall. He knew hunger could fell a mighty warrior much easier than a blade. After much debate, he decided to nab it.

It was a bitter trek to the wreckage and a grumpy walk back but Techno knew it had to be done. He secured the box of horrors onto his tree. *Only if he had nothing else to eat,* he thought, *a last resort.*

Next he moved onto another form of food. He couldn't survive on hardtack alone - nor did he want to - so he had to get another form of food. Unfortunately for him, he had no jars, no salt, no vinegar. He couldn't really preserve or pickle anything as he usually would. That led him to his latest solution: smoking. If he could just smoke some meat he could make a jerky that would last him the winter without spoiling. The problem with smoking was it had to be done quickly or maggots would already start to fester on the meat.

With that in mind, Techno set out to hunt. He found the best time to hunt was a few hours before midnight. There were still remnants of light, even little as it was, that helped him see, but the majority of the titan's were asleep. Yes, *majority.* He had found out there were exceptions to the rule the hard way.

Now that night had fully fallen, Techno set up a large smoker made out of sticks and branches. It was ramshackled for sure, but it would work. He wasn't worried about returning empty handed. He didn't get his nicknames for nothing.

Thirty minutes later he returned with a small deer. It was a juvenile. He felt bad for stealing it's life so early, but it had to be done. It was funny sometimes, how he mourned the animals he killed more than the humans. Maybe it was because the animals didn't deserve it. They were just in the wrong place at the wrong time. Humans however, almost always deserved it.

Techno used to find it strange when people would say intelect separated man from beast. He always thought it was cruelty that divided the two. He supposed that in that respect, Titans and humans were frighteningly close.

Techno rubbed his hand along the still warm body of the deer. Such a beautiful thing. With a heavy heart he slit the beast's throat, letting the warm blood spill onto the cool ground. From there he butchered it, first removing the skin with practiced accuracy, then breaking open the stomach and letting the organs slip out, and finally carving up the flesh. He cut the meat into thin strips and threw them on his smokers.

By the time he was done, his hands were bloody and his shirtsleeves were stained a dark red. He really should have thought about that beforehand. He was never getting it out now. More importantly though, he had plenty of deer meat hanging on his smoker. By morning he would have jerky galore.

Techno smiled. This was time well spent.

Hell yeah his two week rest period was up!

Techno prodded along his ribcage, practically beaming. There wasn't even a hint of pain as he did so.

He could test out the ODM gear now!

Strapping on the gear as fast as he could - which admittedly wasn't that fast. Sue him, it had a lot of buckles - Techno raced to the ground. There weren't any titan's around as far as he could see, so he was safe. Plus, he could always kill em the old fashioned way if push came to shove.

He stood at the base of his tree and aimed about ten feet up. This should be easy, he just had to do what the Scouts did. Simple. Practically buzzing with anticipation, he shot his grapples into the

tree. He may have missed his mark by what? Five feet? But this was his first time, he deserved some leniency.

Techno closed his eyes and drew a deep breath. This was it. He could do this.

He snapped open his eyes, pressed the second trigger, flew through the air, and immediately lost control and rocketed himself into the tree face first.

He slid down the rough bark and back to the ground.

"Heckin' ow."

Techno swear

Techno said a bad word!

Get good nerd

Can't even use ODM gear perfectly first try? Unsubscribed.

Oooooooo Techno swore! I'm telling Philza

"I said heck!"

Techno clutched his bleeding nose.

Okay, so maybe he should have started off easier. Balancing! Yes, balancing sounded good right now. He'd do that.

Five minutes and a no longer bleeding nose later, Techno had attached his grapples to a low hanging branch, suspending himself a few feet off the ground. He steadied himself on the tree trunk beside him. Okay, okay he could do this. He meant it this time.

Reluctantly , he pulled his hand from the solid tree. He wobbled in the air, but stayed up right. A shaky smile found its way onto his face. It was short lived.

With a lurch, his body shot forward to meet the ground. Before he could get his skull split open, he caught himself on the tree.

He sucked in a tense breath as he righted himself. Okay, let's give this another go. He let go of the tree again and held himself in the air. This time, he didn't fall. He let out a sigh of relief. Okay, alright, nice. He's got this.

After a minute of hanging in the air, stock still , he decided it was probably time to up the difficulty level. Taking one hand, he placed it on the tree and pushed away from it. His stomach lurched as he swung from the tree, but he didn't fall. He tried it again, pushing with more effort. This time he wobbled, but his face didn't meet the ground, so he counted it as a win. He kept repeating the motion, putting more effort into the push with each successful repetition.

Once he was confident in staying balanced, he pulled the second trigger lightly, slowly reeling himself up the tree. To his joy, he didn't fall, all he did was shake a little.

It wasn't much, but it was progress.

Today Techno tried flying in a straight line from tree to tree at a *relatively* safe height.

He only fell twice.

That's good in his book.

Using ODM gear was much harder than it looked. He already knew this, but it only really kicked in when he tried mimicking the moves the Scouts used.

He was two weeks into training. Now he could zip from tree to tree and change heights with relative ease. Might not seem like much, but it took him a lot of effort to get to this point.

Three weeks in Techno began to learn how to shift and change direction mid-flight. Now he could launch himself up great heights and change altitude and direction as he flew, not between grapples.

It was nice. Now he actually felt like he had some proficiency at it. Now he was just working on his speed. He was slow and clunky now, but soon he would learn to fly.

A month into the training he killed his first titan with his ODM gear.

In some ways, Techno found it easier. For one, he could scale up great heights with such ease in comparison to his normal method, and he definitely had more range of movement, since he didn't have to be on the actual titan to get up to it's nape.

On the other hand it also made things harder. He had much less practice with the ODM gear so it made his movements more blocky and forced. He was relearning everything he knew about titan combat. It also made him slow. Techno was incredibly fast on his feet, and he knew he could be faster with the ODM gear - after all he had seen the peregrine do it - but he simply did not have the skill level to accomplish it yet.

However, it was a promise of things to come. He could, and would fly. Watch out world. Techno had conquered the Earth, soon Heaven would too be his.

Preparations for the next expedition had begun. Tactics and formations were being discussed over a table concealed under a collection of strewn out maps.

"We don't need the extra cart," Levi said, sliding the little figurine off the map, "The carts only serve to slow us down. This isn't a base establishment mission. We're going in and out, we don't need the extra supplies."

"I disagree," Hange replied, putting the piece back on the map, "this is largely uncharted territory. It's unpredictable and poorly mapped. We don't know what will happen, and having more supplies could save our asses."

The piece was knocked off by a pale hand.

"We know what will happen, titans will fucking swarm and kill us," Levi agrued, "you of all people should know that, shitty glasses. The cart will only help them in their efforts."

The cart was placed back on the map.

"And if your ODM gear breaks? If a cart get's destroyed? If we come across bad terrain? WHat will we do then?"

Cart off.

"Better than being titan chow."

Cart on.

"It's one cart! It's not going to hinder us that much!"

Cart off.

"And I say it will."

"No it won't!"

"Yes it will."

"No!"

"Yes."

"No!"

"Yes."

"No!"

"Yes."

Erwin pinched the bridge of nose, "Children please, let's discuss this civilly."

He got shot two glares in return,

Levi scowled, "Oi, Erwin. Why don't you tell this cretin what I've been saying."

Hange scoffed, "Bold words from someone who's about to get smacked down verbally by the Commander.'

"Did you just call him by his rank to butter him up-?!

"Levi, enough," Erwin sighed.

"Ha! Suck it bitch boy!"

"You to Hange," Erwin scolded

Once they were quiet and he had their attention, Erwin spoke, "Much as I hate to admit it, I agree with Levi on this one.The cart will only slow us down."

Levi smirked. Hange flipped him off.

 A month and a half into working with the ODM gear and Techno was ready to try out some advanced stuff.

During the past two weeks he'd killed twenty two titans. Each titan was a learning experience. It took a while, but he'd managed to merge his previous knowledge and techniques with the ODM gear. The result was a titan killing method honed to deadly perfection. Don't get him wrong, he wasn't completely adept at the ODM gear still. He was a fast learner, just not that fast. But he was proficient. Much more proficient than most of the Scout's he'd seen. He wasn't at Peregrine's level, but he was getting there.

Speaking of the Peregrine, Techno was trying out one of his moves right now. He'd seen the blackhaired man twist his body in the air and spin, round and round, fast and deadly. Like a beyblade. A really deadly beyblade.

It was very difficult. Techno's first attempt ended with him tangled in his own wires.

It was a long journey, but he eventually figured it out. The trick was to give into the momentum. You had to go with the direction you were pulled in, and to change direction you bended, not broke. It was like submitting to the flow of the river. Fight against it and all you'll do is tire yourself out. Work with it and you'll gain the power of the rushing waters. Once he figured it out it was easy. Afterall, his previous technique was all about momentum too.

Now all that was left was to practice.

Technoblade zipped through the trees with frightening speed. He danced nimbly between the large trunks, jetting up and down, flipping and turning in the air. He used the crook of his axe to catch himself on a branch and swing upwards in a quick change of direction. The terrain around him blurred as he flew through it.

When he was young, he used to wonder how it felt for shooting stars to be able to dance through the air like a ballerina. Now he knew.

Departure day. It got on everyone's nerves. With the exception of the batshit crazy Hange. Nah, they were excited, because, well Hange.

"Do you think we'll see any abnormals?" Hange asked excitedly, "Maybe we'll see one with pink hair! If it can happen on a human I don't see why it couldn't on titan? Do you think it could be other colors too?" Hange gasped, "Erwin! If we see one with colored hair can we please capture it."

"Why do you want to find abnormals so bad?" Levi asked, "Kinship?"

Hange laughed.

Levi looked around the Scouts. Almost every single one of them was fidgeting in their seats. From veterans to the recruits, everyone was nervous. *Especially* the aforementioned recruits. Most of them looked like they were about to piss themselves. They had good reason to. The Scout mortality rate was incredibly high, the recruit rate even worse. A lot of them just froze up when finally confronted with a titan. Once you survived your first expedition you had a drastically higher chance of survival. But higher did not mean high. Everyone was fair game out there, titan's didn't discriminate.

Nervousness among the soldiers was common. Afterall, they didn't know if they would make it home.

Levi was another exception to the rule. Unlike the soldiers he wasn't nervous, and unlike Hange, he wasn't excited. The closest description he could find was mournful. He, like everyone, had a chance of dying. However, unlike the others, he didn't spend time wondering if he would be the one to die this time. Instead he looked around his fellow Scouts and wondered how many of them would make it back. How many would they lose? How many would he see die?

Maria's great gate yawned open with a groan. Her chains creaked under the tremendous stress of the gate. Sunlight spilled into the shadow of Shiganshina and bathed the Scouts in it's golden glow.

With the warmth of the rising sun, the expedition began.

The voices were bad today.

Normally they took on the form of a constant hum in his head. Annoying but manageable. He could cope with it.

Sometimes he had . . . . *bad days*.

The dull rumble in his head had escalated into a roar. It was the symbolic crash of thunder and the deafening boom of fireworks. He didn't know what set them off, just that something did.

Their chant filled his head with it's sound. It felt like his skull was about to split open under the pressure. He curled around himself tighter.

Blood for the Blood God

He gasped from the searing pain trapped inside his head.

Kill them all

Tears slipped down his face.

Raze the world to the ground

"Go away," he pleaded.

Technoblade never dies

"Please, just go away," Techno begged the voices, *"Leave me alone."*

Then, in a voice that was not entirely his own, he spoke. It was a voice filled with a million whispers, a million screams, a million pleas. It ripped and split his vocal chords. It was craving, it was bloodthirst, it was sorrow. It commanded attention, it demanded him to listen.

"~~Why fight yourself, Blade?~~" He asked.

Techno passed out.

Levi was beginning to worry.

They were two days into the expedition. It took three days to get back to the man's forest, and they had already lost six soldiers. Thank god the titans hadn't been too heavy yet. They hadn't been swarmed at all the past two days.

He knew he should be thankful, but there was never a Scout expedition without a swarm. It was only a matter of time and he was getting antsy. Something bad was going to happen. He could feel it.

God he hoped whoever this mystery man was was worth the trouble.

Techno woke up to the acrid smell of iron and soured meat.

He pulled himself off the ground. He was laying in a bright clearing. Cream colored butterflies danced lazily in the warm air and a faint odor of blooming flowers filled the meadow. Yellowed fall leaves twirled through the breeze as they fell to the ground.

Surrounding Techno was a circle of corpses. Their blood and guts spiraled around him like a halo. They weren't decaying. These weren't titans.

Techno jumped to his feet. Oh gods, oh gods. What did he do? Who did he kill? *Why couldn't hE RE MEMBER?*

A sharp pain erupted in his temple.

" *Agh* ," he hissed, bringing a hand to his head.

The pain stopped and he pulled his hand away slowly.

What,

What was he thinking about again?

He looked around the crimson meadow.

Ah, right.

With a clearer head, he picked his way through the scattering of corpses. There were organs spewn across the grass, ribs poking every which way and that, decapitated heads, you name it it was there. Everything, except humans.

Techno breathed a sigh of relief. He didn't know what'd he do if he'd killed them.

Now not worrying about accidentally killing the only other people he knew existed, Techno could focus on himself. He felt sticky and gross. He lifted his arms away from his body, his sleeves dripping with dark, congealing blood. He looked down. His shirt was untucked from his pants, and oddly enough, his left pant leg was cut completely around, the lower part falling down to his ankles. The entire leg was splashed with blood. Then again, that wasn't exactly weird at the moment.

Techno looked at the netherite sword that he didn't know was in his hand. He tilted it so he could catch his reflection in the obsidian like metal. Blood and dirt coated his face, and yet there wasn't a single scratch on it. He met his eye for a brief second. His sclera were black like tar. He blinked. His eyes were the same as they had always been. Must've been a trick of the light.

Running a tired hand through his hair, Techno let out a sigh. He needed a bath.

Fucking *shit-*

Levi's gut was right. They had finally reached the mystery man forrest, only to get immediatly swarmed by a fuck ton of titans.

All it took was for one squad to fall and the entire operation fell apart. Damn it! Where was the pink haired man when they needed him?

Levi had been sectioned off from the main group by a hoard of titans, the majority of which were still chasing after him.

The giant hand of a fifteen meter slammed down where he had just been.

Firing his grapples into titan, Levi tore up it's arm, until he was right behind the beast's neck, then sliced the nape off in one swift motion.

Before he even had the chance to recover, a grinning eight meter was already lunging at him.

Levi grappled onto a nearby tree and rocketed away, changing trajections suddenly to boomerang back around the eight meters' neck. The nape was cut with the practiced ease of years of killing. The titan died with a wail, somewhere between a pig's squeal and the cries of a newborn.

A ten meter peeked out at him from behind a tree, but made no move to chase him. An abnormal huh? It had small, sunken eyes, incredibly thin lips and a mouth that was all too wide. They stared at each other, each waiting for the other to make the first move. It was barely ten seconds, but it felt like an eternity. Eventually, Levi caved first. He decided that he didn't want to waste the gas on killing it, as he was already low, so instead of taking out the abnormal, he turned tail and ran.

Wrong move.

Abnormals all have some sort of weird thing about them. Some of them can make rudimentary battle plans, some only attack lone humans, not groups, some have meal preferences. He vividly remembered a titan that terrorized the scouts for three expeditions before they managed to kill it. It had a thing for blonds, and would only go after them.

This titan, it seemed, only gave chase when it's prey ran.

Levi flew through the forest, the sound of thundering footsteps behind him like war drums. It was fine, as long as he could get out to the plains and back to the caravan he would be fine. If push came to shove, he could kill the damn thing.

Suddenly, he dropped from the air like a stone.

What happened?

Did his gear malfunction? No there was no way, he cared for this damn set of ODM gear more than he did himself. Then how-?

The gas.

But no, he was sure he had more than that left. So why was this happening?

He looked down at his gear, and there on his left gas tank, was a tiny, little hole. A leak. A fucking *leak.* Humanity's Strongest was going to die because of a goddess forsaken leak.

Levi looked down as the ground came closer and closer.

Fuck this was going to hurt.

Levi's world whited out with pain.

His ears were ringing. Loud, like an alarm bell. So, so, loud. So loud it hurt.

The world felt floaty and yet all too heavy.

He rolled over onto his stomach with a groan.

His vision was swimming. He could barely see with his world pulsing with light to the beat of his heart.

Fainty, as though underwater, he heard a hissing sound followed by a loud crash.

Loud, too loud.

Ringing footsteps approached him.

Oh, that must be the titan.

A pair of boots entered his vision. He didn't know titans wore boots.

The feet were also human size. Or was Levi just titan sized?

He tilted his head upwards, which was a task in and of itself, as his head felt like lead.

Huh, he thought just before the call of sleep claimed him, *the titan has red eyes.*

Chapter End Notes

Levi, a genically designed killing machine and professional badass

Techno: Is this a bird?

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

And so the two meet.

Chapter Notes

Song I would recommend for this series. Sunlight by Hozier

Technoblade looked at the man crumpled at his feet. Poor peregrine had broken his wings.

Techno kneeled by his unconscious body, taking in the damage. For such a fall, the man was in surprisingly good shape. The top half of his body looked to be mostly unscathed, save for a few cuts and bruises. The bottom half wasn't faring so well. From what he could see, the left leg was mostly spared, but the right leg? Not so much.

The man's blood was seeping through his white pants and boots. Gently as he could, Techno removed the boot and cut away the pant leg so he could actually see the damage. The leg had a compound fracture of the tibia, about halfway down the calf. It wasn't too bad, only a little bit of the bone was poking out of the skin and the bleeding wasn't uncontrollable. Much to his relief, the fibula seemed to be completely intact. Thank the gods.

Using the pant leg he cut off as a makeshift bandage, Techno wrapped the wound up to slow the bleeding. He would fix the man up, but first he had to get them both to a safe location. The forest was still swarming with titans because of the scouts. It wouldn't help anyone if he fixed Peregrine only for them to both get eaten by a titan.

Techno picked up the smaller man, bridal style, and carried him away.

Levi awoke with a start. He was sitting in some sort of tree hollow, his back pressed to the hard wood. Next to him was a pile of fur blankets that was pushed aside to the corners of the hollow.

Where was he? He was supposed to be dead.

"Oh, you're awake."

Levi's head snapped over to the entrance of the hallow, immediately regretting doing so. Pain lanced through his head like an icepick jammed through his skull.

A steady hand found its way to his shoulder.

"Easy," the same deep monotone said, "You've got a concussion," there was a pause, "which is really the least of your worries right now."

Levi looked up, hoping to find the owner of the voice. There, backlit by the sun, was the mystery man. His pink hair cascaded over his shoulders as he bent down to sit besides Levi. His clothes were worn and ripped. His white shirt was so severely stained there were more discolored patches than actual white left. It made Levi want to retch

Levi opened his mouth to speak, but was cut off by a dirty cloth shoved in his direction.

"Bite down on this," the man said.

Levi made a strangled sound of disgust and confusion.

The man tilted his head, "Do you not speak overworld basic?"

Before he could reply, the man continued, "∴⟜⌢⌐ ⌐�ᒐ⊐╾╾⟜ ∟·⟁ ⌐∟∴∴?" he asked in a language Levi couldn't recognise, then switched to another, "═◆⇾❖ ↕═◆⇾⋐◆-?"

"I understood you the first time," Levi interrupted.

The man breathed a sigh of relief, "Oh thank gods. My savana villager is really rusty." he man shoved the cloth at him again, "Like I was saying, I need you to bite down on this."

Levi eyed the dirty cloth with distaste. There was no way he was putting that in his mouth.

"Why?" he asked.

"I've got to set your bone," the man replied, looking at him expectantly, "Now put the rag in your mouth."

What bone? He didn't feel anything wrong. He looked down at his leg and- oh. Yeah, that was a compound fracture. Adrenaline was a thing of wonders.

Levi looked at his leg, then up at the rag.

With a scowl, Levi shoved the outstretched hand away, "There is no way in hell I'm putting my mouth anywhere that *thing."*

The man shot him a dry look, "Listen, I can either set you bone without it and you can alert the entire forest full of titans of our location, or you can bite down on the cloth."

"I'm not putting the rag in my mouth." Levi said stubbornly.

The man dropped the rag, *"Fine."*

A hand ghosted over his calf, the faint touch feeling like a brand on his skin.

"Just warning you," the man said, not looking at him, "This is really going to fucking hurt."

The man winced suddenly, an irritated expression crossing his previously impassive face, "Oh shut up chat! I'm allowed to swear!"

Who the fuck was he talking to? Certainly not Levi, and there was no one else in the nook with them. Great, just great, Levi gets saved from certain death and he gets stuck with a crazy person. Just his fuckin' luck-

With a *'crack'* blinding pain shot through him. A scream worked its way through his vocal chords and up to his lips, but before the noise could escape, a hand in his mouth cut it off. Levi bit down, hard, focusing on the pressure instead of the searing pain in his leg. Hot, metallic blood spread over his tongue and slid down his throat. He slammed his eyes shut and clenched his entire body, every single muscle held tight with pain.

"You can, uh, let go now," the man mumbled.

Levi opened his eyes, his gaze immediately flicking down to the hand in his mouth. Slowly, he unclenched his jaw, the hand pulling loose with lines of spit and blood. A clear row of teeth marks lined the back of the man's hand, almost every single one drawing blood. It looked real nasty. Bites like that could get people killed.

The man followed Levi's gaze and looked down at his own hand. He shrugged, "It'll heal."

Levi spat out a mouthful of blood, "why didn't you tell me that was the alternative?"

"Would you have done it if I had?" the man countered.

"No."

"Then my reasons are clear." the man stated, "Besides, it's better than getting eaten by a titan."

Levi wiped the blood from his lips, "Debatable."

"Well suck it up, because we're doing it again."

Levi groaned, "Another broken bone?"

"No," the man replied, "Just some sutures."

"I don't need a gag for that."

The man leveled him with a flat look, "You're sure?"

"Yes."

The man paused, seemingly weighing over the options, "Okay," he decided, and Levi had to hold back a triumphant smirk, "But if you scream I'm putting the cloth in your mouth with or without your permission."

Nine sutures later, the two men were left in an awkward silence.

Levi took it upon himself to break it, "Who are you?"

The man frowned, "I wanted to ask that too. All I know about you is a name. Scouts. What are you scouting? Where do you come from? Are there more people?"

"You don't know about the walls?" Levi asked with a raised eyebrow. Who didn't know about the walls? You could live under a rock and still know what they were. They were the only thing keeping the remnants of humanity alive after all. Maybe Erwin was right, maybe this guy was from

another civilization that had somehow survived without the walls. Or maybe there was another set of walls out there. Either way it was important.

"Walls?" the man repeated, "What walls?"

"That's where the scouts come from," Levi explained, "It's where all of humanity is from. The walls keep out the titans and protect humanity. If you've never even heard of the walls then where did you come from?"

"I don't know," the man said, meeting his eye unflinchingly. He wasn't lying, "I was about to eat some soup one second and the next I was smack dab in the middle of a monster-filled prairie."

Great , Levi thought, *Amnesia.*

"So you don't know where you came from?" he pressed.

The man frowned, "I know where I was. I don't know how I got here."

Bingo!

"Where were you?" Levi asked.

"The tundra of the Dream SMP. In my cabin."

"The dream what now?"

"SMP," the man replied, "It was a server."

Yep. Crazy. Probably hit his head or something and messed something up in there. Great. This entire operation was a waste. All they got from it was a weird pink haired man with amnesia. An entire squad plus who knows how many died for this. Fuck.

"Do you know of any other people outside the walls?" Levi asked. Even if this man wasn't all there in the head, he could provide them a important info if he'd met others.

To Levi's dismay, the man shook his head, "'fraid not. It's just been me out here for months. Alone."

Well damn. Now Levi felt bad for the man.

A long silence stretched between the two of them.

Eventually, the man spoke, "Uh, so, I don't think we've been introduced," the man said with a strained mumble, "I'm Technoblade."

Levi looked at him, "Your name is Technoblade?"

The pink haired man fidgeted, "I mean most people call me Techno, but yeah."

"There's no way your name is *Technoblade.*"

Techno shrugged, "It has been since I was born," he paused, "I think?"

"What do you mean *you think?*"

Techno waved a flippant hand, "It's been a while since I was born man, give me a break. But yes, Technoblade is my name. For as long as I can remember. What's your's?"

"Levi."

"A short name for a short man, fitting."

"Oi, watch it," Levi hissed, "I may be injured but I can still kick your ass."

"In the air? That'd be a memorable fight, little peregrine. But in general, you're ten thousand years too early to kill me, brat."

Levi scoffed, " *Brat?* If anything you're the brat here! You're like what twenty five? Twenty six? No, no, how old are you? I want to know."

"What kind of years?" Technoblade asked.

"What?"

"I asked what kind of years? Overworld? Hypixel? Nether? Ender? What's the metric?" Techno asked.

Levi's brow furrowed. Okay this man was certifiably insane. Levi was going to die in a titan infested forest because he got stuck with this psychotic man. Why did he always get stuck with the crazies? First Hange, now Techno.

"Normal years!" Levi shouted, "What other years are there?"

Techno groaned, "I *just* listed them. Overwarld, Hypixel, Nethe-"

"I know what you said!" Levi interrupted, "Normal years, Technoblade. 365 days?"

"Oh, so then Overworld years. Okay uh," the man's mouth pressed in a firm line, "I can't quite remember. I know Prime has been around for 7,000 years, and I was there when it was founded so I'm at least that old. But I was there for the Nether Reactor Wars, which was at least 2,000 years before. After that It's kind of fuzzy so," he trailed off, "About 12,000ish give or take a thousand. Or two. It's hard to remember."

Levi blinked, "You're delusional."

Technoblade hissed, bringing a hand to his forehead, "Maybe don't say that. It riles chat up."

Point proven.

Techno must've seen the expression on his face, because he winced harshly and jumped to his feet, tremors running through his tensed body, "I'm, uh, I'm going to make you a brace for that leg. Don't move. I-I'll be right back."

With that, he left the tree, jumping from the branch falling out of Levi's sight.

Techno tore through a titan's neck without mercy. The voices had gotten angry. They didn't like being called crazy.

Techno knew what kind of crazy he was, but he knew what was true. He wasn't just making shit up.

12,000 or more years of his life had been a hellish slog of staying alive. It wasn't just a dream, it was a painful reality he had fought through. Years and years passed and Techno was still standing. He forgot a lot of things with time, but he never forgot the pain.

He could feel the burn of every blade against his skin. He knew the clash of blades, the taste of blood, the song of war. He knew them on both sides. Both triumphant strike and bite of metal. He could remember the feeling of his wounds stitching themselves back together under the effect of a healing potion. He knew what it was like to reattach his limbs with nothing more than a sewing needle and a golden apple.

He knew how time slipped between his fingers like water, and how it passed in the blink of an eye and yet went on for eternity. One second smiling with a friend, the next at their grave. Once at war, next reading of that war from a textbook. Watching the leaves fall, blinking, and realizing they're now green. Time was a fickle thing. Memories even more so.

Techno wasn't lying. His life wasn't some fantasy he concocted. Each and every second was painfully real.

The voices were screaming at him now. Kill him. *Kill him.* **Kill him!**

Techno would not. He wasn't a pupett.

Techno knew why the man said what he did. This world didn't seem to have knowledge of the end or the nether, or anything that Techno knew to be true. Plus, even back in his old world people didn't believe him about his age or his voices. It wasn't exactly common to be immortal. Phil had been his only solace. He believed him about the voices, he knew about his true age.

Phil. The name was full of yearning and sorrow. *Phil. Gods, he missed Phil.*

Another nape split and bled beneath his blade.

Techno was used to being called crazy. He didn't mind, *really.* They were right. He was. Voices filled his head and screamed for blood. Sometimes he blacked out and couldn't remember where he'd been or what he did. He could deal with people calling him crazy. It didn't phase him.

But stress had built up in him during his stay in the forest. He'd been stuck here for half a year, completely isolated except for the drumming inside his head. His breaking point had become dangerously easy to reach. Back in his old world he would take a lot before he snapped. The voices could chant and sing all they wanted, and he could manage it. But here? All it took was one bad day.

His chest heaved up and down with labored breathing. He stood atop a pile of steaming bodies, blood evaporating off his face in wisps of smoke.

He ran a tired hand through his hair.

He should,

He should probably get back to that brace. Yes. He shouldn't keep Levi waiting. He was probably in pain. Techno had something to do. Someone to care for.

He just needed to calm down.

It was dark by the time Techno returned to the tree.

"Sorry about the wait," he mumbled, setting the stuff down on the ground.

Levi was nestled in the fur blankets, face twisted in pain, "You got the brace?"

Techno held up a collection of sticks with a weak smile, "Not exactly, but I got something better." he pulled two small wooden jars from his pocket, "I got lucky," he explained, "I was looking for honey to help keep your wound from going sour, and I stumbled upon a patch of poppies."

Techno pulled the wooden cork from the smaller jar and handed it to Levi.

Levi looked down at the jar. Inside was some sort of brown, viscous liquid.

"What is it?" he asked.

Techno passed him a small spoon, "Opium. It'll kill the pain. Only take one spoonful. I don't really feel like making you retch so you don't overdose."

Levi spooned out the liquid and put it in his mouth. He had to resist the urge to gag. It was bitter and earthy, unlike anything he'd ever had before, "That's disgusting."

Techno laughed lowly, "You're right about that. Be careful though, that stuff creeps up on you. Once you're no longer in pain don't take anymore, or you'll get an addiction so strong being without the stuff will feel like you're missing your own arm."

Levi set down the jar. Tilting his head back so he could rest it on the wooden wall. Techno meanwhile began whittling the branches down for the brace.

"Tell me when it kicks in," Techno told him.

Levi nodded weakly, his head protesting at the action. The concussion had abated, but not completely gone away.

The sound of splitting wood and scraping metal became the only sounds filling the nook.

Five minutes later, Levi started feeling floaty. His body relaxed without the burning pain searing through it.

"I think it's working," he said slowly.

Techno looked up from his work and walked over to him. The pink-haired man observed him closely, red eyes flicking over his body with the sharp gaze of a predator. Except the eyes were not hostile towards him. They held a gentle kindness that Levi knew he didn't deserve.

"It is," Techno finally decided.

Gently, the man removed the blankets from his form and focused in on his injured leg. First the man removed the bloodied bandages, then he wiped the wound down with a clean wet rag.

Techno pulled a larger jar from his pocket, popping off the top and dipping his fingers into the jar. His hand came away with a thick golden liquid.

"That the honey?" Levi asked.

"Yep." he said, slathering the honey over the wound with a gentle hand.

Levi hummed. He couldn't remember the last time he'd had honey. He loved putting it in tea or eating it raw. It was sickly sweet, but he enjoyed it's floral flavor. He didn't get to eat it very often because of its price and scarcity. Only the rich in Sina could afford the stuff.

"Thank you," Levi said.

"What for?" Techno asked.

"You're doing all this for someone you've never met." Levi said, "Even when I've been rude to you." After mulling over the way he acted towards Techno and the hurt reaction he got, Levi realized he was being a massive dick. He shouldn't have said the things he said.

It was something he didn't do often. But he knew he had to. He knew he should. He wanted to.

"I'm sorry, Techno."

He apologized.

Techno went completely still. He was silent for a long time, his hands pausing their work as he froze. He stood there, unmoving. Techno took a sharp intake of breath and let it out.

Techno shut his eyes tight, eyebrows titled up in an emotion Levi didn't recognise, *"Thank you,"* he whispered.

The man took another slow breath and went back to tending to the leg. Now that the honey was well applied to the wound, he took the cleanest cloth he had and wrapped it around the leg as a bandage. He gave his work a last look over. It wasn't his best, but he was working with limited resources. He did pretty well for what he had. Satisfied, he stood from his work and left.

An apology was a rare thing. It was one of those facts of life. The sky was blue, the sun was cruel, and people didn't like to admit when they were wrong.

Techno could count one hand how many people had apologized to him and sincerely meant it. Phil was first and foremost. The man was always kind and gentle. They were together through thick and thin. They'd both wronged each other at times, but they both set things right. It was an unbreakable bond, stronger than the netherite that cloaked them.

The next was the voices. Oh sure they said sorry all the time, but they hardly ever meant it. Only once was it sincere. Under the kind sun and coated in blood. Petals painted red. They'd said it.

Sorry.

What were they apologizing for? He couldn't remember anymore. All he knew was that they never did again. Not really.

And now, his third. Levi had said sorry. For something he was right about to an extent. He was *concerned* about Technoblade's feelings. He was thankful for Technoblade. He said sorry to Technoblade. To the Blood God, war incarnate, the Blade. He said *sorry.*

No one except Phil did that. Not when all he brought with him was death and destruction. There was a reason the Wither and the Blood God's stories often overlapped.

No one said sorry to him. Tommy, Wilbur, Dream, no one. No one said sorry for what they did to him.

And here this man did.

Techno looked up to the unfamiliar constellations in hopes of answers. The unknown stars didn't provide any.

Techno was working on the brace again. It had been two days of work to find the right materials, but now the sticks were done, now he just had to tie and bind them in animal twine.

Levi sat in the bed and looked around the nook, bored. There wasn't much to see. It was clear this man was just surviving. The place wasn't particularly clean, which drove Levi slightly mad, but he knew it was the best Techno could do right now. It didn't mean that the second he could walk that he wouldn't be scrubbing every inch of this place down.

To the man's credit, he'd noticed Levi's discomfort with dirt and had tried to clean it -and himself up a bit - and brought a bucket of clear water for Levi to clean himself with. It wasn't perfect, but he appreciated it.

Levi's wandering eyes landed on a shelf carved into the wall. Setting in messy rows were little wooden carvings. Some were terrible, blocky and unrecognisable, but some were quite elegant and well made. He'd seen such things sold as trinkets and toys in Maria.

He was disrupted from his thoughts by the steady voice of Techno, "Will the Scouts come back for you?" he asked.

Levi leaned back and thought about it, "No." he said, "They saw me disappear in the middle of a battle and not come back. At best I'm MIA, at worst they've already planned my funeral. They might've come back if they'd seen you in the battle, but they didn't. They'll probably assume you're dead. Getting to this forest from the walls is risky. They won't do it again because they think we're both dead."

Techno hummed, "These walls, you need to get back to them?"

"Ideally, yes." Levi didn't want to live out his life as a hermit in a forest.

"How far are they from here?"

"The walls?" He asked and Techno nodded, "About 400 kilometers due east."

Techno's head tilted in confusion, "Kilometers?"

During the few days living with Techno Levi had learned that the man was strange. Well, stranger than originally thought. He would sometimes say things that made no sense or not understand what Levi thought to be a simple concept.

Now that Levi wasn't under a world of stress anymore, he didn't find Techno's quirks to be annoying. Just strange. It wasn't like it was anything new for him. He was friends with Hange, who was arguably weirder than Techno. Techno still hated titans. That gave him a leg up over Hange.

"It's a measure of distance." Levi explained.

"Oh," he said, "Like chunks."

Levi nodded.

"How long of a trip is it?"

"Three days on horseback," Levi replied, "Why?"

Techno stared off into the distance at nothing, seemingly mulling that over.

"Wait," Levi said, "Don't tell me you're thinking about attempting the journey. That's cr-

"Crazy?" Techno asked with a grin on his face, "Then you're lucky you got stuck with me, or you'd never get home."

"We don't have any horses." Levi argued.

"We have ODM gear." Techno shot back.

"We'll run out of gas!"

"Not if we walk from branch to branch instead of flying, and we bring extra then we could make it out of the forest with gas to spare."

"We'd have to travel over kilometers of open prairie," Levi explained, "we're practically handing ourselves over to the titans wrapped in a bow! We'd die."

"We'd have our ODM gear, Levi. I've seen you fight on open land before."

"And if we run out of gas out there?" Levi questioned, "What then?"

Techno laughed, "You forget, Peregrine. I learned to fight Titans without ODM gear and I won."

Levi glared at Technoblade, but didn't say anything more.

Technoblade smiled, "Then it's settled, once your leg gets healed up we'll set out."

"We're going to die."

Techno leveled him with a flat look, "Levi, I will make sure we get to the walls safely. You have my word."

"What good does your word do to protect us?"

"Levi," Techno said slowly, "I've conquered the world with my own hands, I've razed countries to the ground over betrayal, I've fought gods and won. My word's worth more than you think."

"That's narcissistic."

Techno blinked at him, "I promise you Levi. You will make it home alive."

For some reason, Levi was inclined to believe him. Maybe it was in the way he spoke with complete confidence. Maybe it was the complete sincerity of his tone. Whatever it was, Levi looked at Technoblade for what felt like the first time, and knew he would make it home.

"What about you?" he found himself asking.

Techno scoffed, "Of course. That's a given. Technoblade never dies."

A gust of wind blew through the forest, shaking the branches. The rustle of leaves seemed to echo his boast.

Technoblade never dies, Technoblade never dies, Technoblade never dies.

The brace was done. It was a sturdy thing, built from solid wood and strong hides. Somehow it was reinforced with thin strips of metal. When questioned about this Techno just muttered something about sword handles and melting points.

Techno showed him how to put the brace on, guiding Levi's hands along with his patiently as he explained how to fasten the device to Levi's leg.

"Now eventually you'll be able to walk with just the brace on, but for now you'll need support so," like a magician, Techno pulled out a pair of crutches from behind his back, "tada." he said it in full monotone.

Levi gave him a flat look, "You want me to use crutches?"

"Yes."

Levi groaned, "fine."

Techno smiled gently.

That night, Techno took him down to the ground to practice with the crutches.

Techno had *tried* to carry him down bridal style, as it would be safer for Levi's leg, but Levi had shot that idea down immediately. Levi wanted to go down the tree in his own ODM gear, afterall he wouldn't be doing any real maneuvers, just descending. Techno put his foot down there, absolutely forbidding it. In the end, they came to the compromise of Levi piggybacking on Techno as he took them both down.

"You tell Hange about this, I will kill you," Levi hissed in his ear.

Techno tilted his head to look up at Levi, "I have no idea who that is."

"Closest thing to a mad scientist we've got back in the Walls," Levi explained, "They study titans. They actually like the things. Thinks they're cute."

Techno scoffed, "and you thought *I* was crazy."

"You suggested we attempt a trip across titan territory without horses, and I agreed to it," Levi said, "We're both a little crazy."

"Genius and madness are two sides of the same coin, Levi."

Levi gagged, "Great, now you sound like Hange. I thought I'd finally escaped them."

Techno just laughed.

They reached the ground, Techno setting Levi down gently.

He was passed the crutches, they were the perfect size.

"Okay, so you have to use your crutches in place of your hurt leg. Where you would swing that leg forward, you swing the crutches," Techno explained, "It can be difficult and awkward at first, but you'll get used to it."

"Got a lot of experience with this, huh?"

To Levi's surprise, Techno just lifted up one pant leg, revealing a patchwork of pale scars across his skin, the silver lines intertwining and overlapping like a spider's web.

Techno smirked, "You could say that."

Levi looked away, "No need to brag."

Starting with his good foot forward, Levi tried to walk. He swung forward with the crutches, stumbling a bit, unused to the motion. Techno was right beside him, a steady presence as Levi wobbled and shook.

"Takes a bit of strength doesn't it?" Techno smiled.

"What am I if not strong?" Levi replied.

Techno hummed. He'd seen Levi's strength firsthand. The shorter man was definitely stronger than any human ought to be. Techno knew the feeling. Apparently it ' *wasn't normal'* to shatter small boulders with a punch or pull a horse drawn carriage by himself. Sounded like government bullshit to him, but what did he know.

Levi continued his shaky walk, picking up confidence and proficiency with each step.

"Look at that, you're a natural. If I didn't know better, I'd say you'd broken your leg before."

"Shut up."

"Why's your hair pink?"

"I don't know."

"Great explanation."

"Thanks, it's the best one I've got."

Techno slept with his back against the wall.

Levi slept in a bed made out of furs. Furs that Techno had collected and owned.

Techno never mentioned it. Levi thought about it a lot.

One week into living with Technoblade, Levi saw him kill a titan for the first time.

Techno was sharpening one of his steel knives on a river stone. The action was slow and careful, his hand steady with practice.

A tremor ran through the earth.

With a calm expression, Techno put down his work and jumped off the tree.

Levi scrambled out of the nook to get a view of what was happening.

Techno charged straight ahead at the titan. Amature move, the titan would kill him easily with a swat of it's hand. It was a wonder how Techno had survived so long. The titan did just as Levi thought, swiping it's overgrown hand at Techno, or rather, it tried to. In the blink of an eye, Techno changed trajectories, avoiding the hand and flinging himself in an arc over the titan, arriving right at its neck. It was over in a second.

Techno flew back up to the branch, sat down, and resumed sharpening his knife like nothing happened.

Techno had managed to find apples of all things. Red as Techno's eyes and full as the moon in the night. They were ripe and crisp. A delicious luxury out in the titan ridden hellscape. They didn't bring fresh produce out on expeditions, just jerky and those horrid bars of hardtack.

Techno devoured his apple ravenously, the sticky juices dripping from his mouth and hands and falling onto the wooden floor. He ate like he was trying to kill something, his teeth flashing and tearing into the apple's flesh like he was a wolf after a sheep's neck.

Levi, meanwhile, ate his meticulously and cleanly, making sure not even a drop of juice made it onto his hands. Y'know, not like an utter *savage*.

Techno moved onto destroying- sorry, *'eating'* his next apple. The last one was completely gone, not even core or stem leftover. Now, he claimed his next victim, ripping the poor apple to shreds.

A chunk of fruit hit Levi's cheek

"Goddesses," He growled, a vein popping on his head, "Would it kill you to eat like you have a shred of civility? Do you know what manners are?"

Techno paused his crusade against all of apple kind to point a hand at Levi, a sour expression on his face, "I've been a king of a world superpower, Levi. I've had enough of 'civility' and 'manners' for a lifetime," Techno stared pointedly at the apple, "More than a lifetime actually. For like, twenty of them. Give me like 2,000 years, and I'll eat an apple like you. For now, I'm going to commit mass genocide on them."

With that, he resumed his meal

Another splatter of apple hit Levi in the head.

Without another thought, Levi chucked his apple core at Techno as hard as he could.

He should put all the trash in the same place after all.

Sometimes, Techno would disappear for a day or two. It didn't happen often, maybe once or twice. Sometimes it was for an explained reason, out hunting, looking for supplies left by scouts, planning their route to the walls. Sometimes, he did not explain. Sometimes he would come back, smoke rising off his body. Sometimes he would come back with blood covered hands. Blood that didn't evaporate.

Techno was sodden with sorrow when he came back like that. Ashamed, almost. He didn't meet Levi's eye when they talked, if they even did. When he came back he was quiet, scarily quiet.

It was clear it was a sensitive topic, so Levi didn't mention it.

He did however, make Techno take a bath before he could get within 10 feet of him.

"You stink worse than titan breath," he would complain, "Go wash yourself before I retch from your mere presence alone."

Techno would smile. Not much, just a little curl of his lips, but it was something. He would become closer to his normal self.

The sound of scraping wood filled the quiet hollow.

"So," Levi said awkwardly, "You carve?"

Techno looked up from what was obviously a carving, "Yes."

"How long have you been doing it?"

Techno thought about it, "About half a year now. Little bit less."

"You any good?" he asked.

Techno just tossed him the carving in his hands, "You be the judge."

Levi caught it. He opened up his fingers, revealing the delicate carving. It was a man with curly hair and a strong jawline. He was wearing a draped piece of cloth over his body, the fabric wrapping around his hips like a skirt. He had muscular arms which, attached to them, was a great pair of wings.

"An angel," Levi said softly.

Techno chuckled, "He wishes. He's just a man."

"But he has wings."

"And so do you, little peregrine,"

"Oi, watch it with the 'little', brat."

Techno pointedly ignored the insult, "His name was icarus," he said slowly, "and he lost his wings."

Levi nodded, sensing a story there, he said, "Tell me about him."

Techno looked surprised for a second, before starting his story, "It all started with his father, Daedalus. He was a genius inventor . . ."

Now that Techno had started telling stories, he didn't stop

His stories filled the hollow, his melodic voice carrying vivid depictions of the impossible with it. He spoke of triumph and loss, heroes and villains. Sacrifice and gain, life and death.

Levi listened with rapt attention every time Techno told a story. He learned about Prometheus, Zeus, Sisaphus, Hades, Arachnie, Cronos, Giya, and Thesius, to name a few.

Eventually Levi joined in and told stories of the wall goddesses. In turn, Techno branched out and told him about Prime and Notch,as well as stories from the End and from the Nether. Levi learned about the great dragon and the terrible wither.

Originally, Techno had tried to tell Ender and Nether stories in what he called 'overworld' but he found the lines of flowing poetry fell flat in Levi's language. Instead he began to tell them in their native languages and *then* translated them

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¦ ⸗↘7 ¦⸱⅃∫⊣¦⅂L·¦7 ↘!¡⅃L·7 ::‖" Techno recited dutifully, finishing the poem.

"What does it mean?" Levi asked.

"It's about the ender dragon's compassion turning to anger and greed over the years. It's told through the eyes of a young enderman, slowly growing up and beginning to recognise the growing cruelty in their queen." Techno replied, "It's one of the oldest poems the End has. One of the most popular too."

They exchanged stories late into the night. Neither was particularly religious, but they learned about tales neither had heard before and learned more about each other . It was . . . fun. Levi enjoyed it.

Techno shivered. The voices were acting up. They demanded blood, they demanded death.

Kill him, kill him, kill him

And Levi was right there, helpless in his sleep. It would be so easy to kill him. To slit his throat and let his blood slip into the fur blankets of the bed. It would be so goddamn easy. It would be so lovely.

Techno had never wanted anything more in his life. At least, not in this moment. Right now he could not think of anything more important or desirable than killing Levi.

Kill him, kill him, kill him

His hands twitched for his sword. Just quickly. He wouldn't draw it out. He wouldn't torutre him. Just kill him. That's all. *That's all.* He slowly unsheathed his sword, netherite whispering it's promises in the form of the sharp *shwing* it made as it was drawn.

He stood over Levi's unconscious body. Sword lifted up in the air.

Kill him, kill him, kill him

He had a knife to his own throat in an instant. No. He promised that Levi would make it home safely. He didn't want him to die. He didn't want to kill him! Why did he want to kill him!?

He didn't! He did!

That same bubbling desire burned beneath his skin.

He flicked the knife over his face, carving a shallow cut into his cheek. He focused on the searing pain. Let the pain ground him.

His name was Technoblade. He was older than Prime itself. He had named the constellations and told their stories.

He did not want to kill Levi.

He let his sword fall to the ground and stalked away.

Techno handed Levi his portion of breakfast. There was a bandage over his cheek, the white of the cloth tinted red from blood.

"What happened to your face?" Levi asked.

Techno served himself some food, "Was sharpening my knife. My hand slipped. Knife went flying."

Levi narrowed his eyes, *"Right."*

He clearly didn't believe it, but didn't press.

Techno hopped into the nook with a dopey grin on his face.

"Guess what I found!" He sing-songed.

"What?" Levi asked. Techno was hardly ever this excited.

Techno pulled a glass bottle from behind his back with a flourish. A light brown liquid sloshed around in the bottle.

"Is that what it looks like?" Levi asked. But no, it couldn't be. Who would bring whiskey with them on an expedition? A single name came to mind. Moblit. You could only deal with Hange around titans for so long while sober. It made sense.

Techno nodded eagerly, "It is!"

"Pass me that."

Techno did as he was told, and Levi promptly popped the cork out and took a large swig, "Damn Moblit, he seriously brought good shit with him on an expedition. This must've cost a fortune!"

Techno grabbed the bottle and did the same as Levi.

"Never took you as someone who likes to drink," Levi mused.

Techno wiped his lips, "I'm not, but I've been stuck out in a titan infested forest for half a year. I'm going to get fucked up, and no one is allowed to say anything."

There was the characteristic wince that always happened when Techno swore, "Not even you, chat! Let me have this!"

Levi sighed sadly, "God I wish I could get drunk right now."

Techno raised a brow, "You can't?"

Levi shook his head, "Nope, I've got some crazy high alcohol tolerance. Nobody knows why."

"Sucks to suck I guess." Techno said before taking another large sip.

They continued to pass the bottle between them. Back and forth.

As it turns out, Techno was an affectionate drunk. How did Levi find this out? Techno was currently trying to wrestle him into cuddling.

"I'm cold Levi!" He winned.

"Wear a blanket!" Levi shouted, pushing away Techno's hands.

"Nooooo," Techno said, "Chat doesn't wanna blanket. They wanna cuddle you!"

"Who the fuck is chat!"

"I don't know either! They just want to cuddle you!" Techno caught his hands and pinned them to Levi's side. Then he went in for the kill. He wrapped Levi up in a big ol' bear hug.

It was . . . surprisingly nice.

"You're a good 'riend Levi," Techno slurred, a smile on his lips.

"If my leg wasn't broken, I would kick your ass."

Techno hummed, and hugged him tighter, "I know."

They ate rabbit for dinner. Again.

If Levi wasn't used to eating hardtack all the goddess damn time, he would have found this a problem.

Techno didn't seem to mind either. He must've had a military background too. Only military folk had this sort of attitude about food.

Techno was dreaming. His writhed against the wall, his body thrashing from shadows that only he could see. Cries of distress slipped from his lips.

The noise was enough to wake Levi up. It was too dark to see anything properly, but he could still see that Techno was having a nightmare.

"Techno?"

Techno continued to thrash.

"Techno?" He tried again.

More thrashing.

"Technoblade?"

Techno's eyes shot open, wide and shaking. They were pitchblack, with only his red irises left untouched. Before Levi could properly see them, Techno twisted out of the way, throwing himself against the floor, his hands gripping at his head.

"Techno?" He asked, crawling over to the quivering body.

"Don't come any closer," Techno ordered in a shaky voice.

He ignored it.

Techno jolted, his hands twisting tighter into his hair, "I said don't come any closer Levi!"

Now he was concerned. Levi reached an arm out and set it on Technoblade's shoulder, "Techno are you okay-?"

Techno lunged at him suddenly, a knife clutched in his hand.

Levi toppled back, ignoring the pain that shot through his leg.

The knife stopped not even a centimeter from his throat. The blade trembled, the silver metal catching the moonlight just so.

What had stopped it was Techno's other arm, which was struggling against the knife arm to hold it back. Techno stared at him with a strained, fearful expression. One eye was normal white and red, the other was an eclipse of darkness.

" *Levi,"* Technoblade said in a voice that was a hundred hushed whispers in one, ***"Please, get away-"*** he gasped in pain, his whole body shuddering with the action. His eyes shut tight, held, then slowly opened them. They were the same as they'd ever been, *"from me,"* He finished.

Levi didn't need to be told twice.

He shuffled back to the opposite side of the room, and watched and Techno wrestled with himself. Literally, wrangling the knife from his own hand, and wondered if there was some truth to Techno's perceived madness.

In the morning, Levi got a soft, ' *'m sorry.* '

"It's alright," he said, "Nobody got hurt."

Techno looked at him with sad, red eyes, but didn't say anything else.

"Ow," Levi said dully.

Techno looked away from the rabbit he was skinning, "everything alright?"

Levi rubbed soothing circles along his neck, "Yeah, just got crick in my neck." he hissed as his fingers found the right spot.

Techno looked down at the rabbit in his hands, "Huh."

The next night, when Levi went to bed, he found two fur pillows in the bed.

He picked one up and prodded at it, it was soft and plush. He gave it a squeeze. Incredibly soft. A small feather poked out of the furr.

He turned to Techno, "You seriously made feather pillows?"

Techno, who was leaning up against his wall, cracked open a tired eye and shrugged.

Levi tossed a pillow at him and bullied him into using it.

Techno's fingers danced over Levi's closing wound, "It's closing up nicely. The bone should be healed in two weeks. Give or take."

Lemi hummed, his mind on something else.

Techno rolled Levi's pants down, "How's the pain? Do you need more opium?"

"I want to help," Levi said. Techno had done nothing for the past two weeks except care for Levi. He gave up everything he had to help Levi and took nothing for himself. Levi was down for the count, he really couldn't do much, but he didn't like feeling useless.

Techno furrowed his brow in confusion, "Okay? I don't see what that has to do with opium?"

"You just keep taking care of me and giving me all your stuff while I do nothing for you. I want to help."

"Again, what does this have to do with opium? Like do you need it or are you good-?"

"No! I don't need opium Techno!" Levi exclaimed, "Could you just- just listen for a *second?"*

Techno closed his mouth with a click.

Levi sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose, "Sorry. It's just, you know, I feel useless. I want to give something back to you. I don't like just taking while giving nothing in return."

"You will help," Techno tried to say, "When your leg is healed and we set off to the walls. You can fight titans and help me then."

Levi shook his head, "That's like two weeks away Techno, maybe more. Is there anything I can do until then?"

Techno scratched his throat, thinking about it. After a minute, he finally spoke, "Do you know how to sew?"

Levi shook his head.

"Would you be willing to learn?" Techno asked.

"Yes."

"Alright," Techno said, "We're going to travel in the winter. It will probably be cold and we'll need warmer clothing so we don't freeze. You can help make them?"

"Thank you."

Techno made a strange face, "Why are you thanking me? I'm about to make you do one of the hardest things I know."

"It can't be that hard."

"Trust me it can."

"What the fuck is a saddle stitch?"

Techno and Levi sat together over a small pile of furs and skins.

"A type of stitch."

Levi shot him a glare, "Yeah, no shit sherlock."

"A difficult type of stitch?" Techno offered.

"Again, very helpful."

"Thank you."

"That was sarcasm."

"Oh."

Levi had made a cloak. It was rough and simple in design, with messy stitches and patchy work, but he had made it and that somehow made it all the better.

Techno picked it up to observe it, "Nice work." he said simply.

It took Levi a lot of effort not to glow with pride.

The next morning, when Levi awoke, he found a little peregrine embroidered in white thread on the breast of the cloak.

Techno was polishing his sword..

"What are your weapons made of?" Levi asked. He'd been meaning to ask for a while now, he just kept forgetting to actually do it. The metal was unlike anything he'd ever seen before. Black as the sky at midnight, with a purple sheen. Strong and unbreakable. He hadn't seen it chip *once* and it was still deadly sharp, despite the fact Techno never honed the edge.

"Depends on what part you're talking about," Techno replied, "The inside is diamond, but the blade's coated in netherite, which is the black you see. It makes the blade ridiculously strong."

"I'm sorry, did you just say diamond?"

"Yup," Techno said, not even looking up from his sword.

". . . . *How fucking rich are you?!* " The man wore gold earrings for goddesses sake! How did he not see this?

Techno laughed, "Pretty poor right now. All I've got is my armour and my weapons. Besides, I didn't buy them. I made them. Mined the diamonds and netherite myself. Piece of advice, Levi, never buy netherite. Propper ingots should be made with a ratio of one to one with gold and pure netherite. It makes it less brittle. Merchants bump the gold to scrap ratio up to three to one. It's a scam. Might as well just use iron armor."

"Thanks, I'm never going to use that information." Levi deadpanned.

Techno gave him a playful shove, "Hey, I ended up in your world. Who knows if you'll end up in mine someday. Just looking out for you."

Techno walked into the nook. It had been a day and a half since Levi had last saw him.

The pink haired man sat down. Now that Levi could more properly see him, he had smudges of blood on his hands and a large package thrown over his back.

"I got some stuff," Techno said.

"I can see that, brat."

Techno hummed, throwing his package onto the ground.

A bunch of fresh jerky tumbled out onto the floor. Like a *lot* of it.

"I also got some fur," Techno said.

He unfurled a mass of silky, black fur. It was enormous.

"Techno," Levi said slowly, "What did you kill?"

"Uh."

" *Techno.*"

"A bear," Techno muttered.

Levi pinned him with a stare, "A bear."

"A bear."

"Why the fuck did you kill a bear?!"

"In my defense it attacked me first!"

Something happened today.

The day had started out normal enough, Techno had woken a few hours after the sun rose. Levi generally woke much earlier than him, and during the first few days of Levi's stay, Techno would freak out whenever Levi got up. The sudden movement set off danger alarms in Techno's head and forced him from his sleep to deal with what he assumed was an attacker.

The first day, Levi had ended up with a sword to his throat not even ten second after waking up. Techno had apologized profusely. It never happened again, but the man would still startle from his sleep with wide, fearful eyes.

It made even Levi's cold heart sink. Levi saw the affects of PTSD almost everyday, afterall, he was part of the scouts. He knew what it looked like.

Now that Techno adjusted to Levi's presence, he stopped panicking.

Levi watched Techno sleep. The man's chest rose and fell in strong, sturdy breaths. His face, even in sleep, was guarded, showing no emotion beyond the hardened mask he wore. Techno was always gentle, surprisingly so for a man of his size and capability, but he had the face of a warrior. A face that betrayed his years in the crucible of battle.

Techno's eyes twitched under his eyelids. He was dreaming, goddess knows about what. A smile twitched across his face then vanished like it was never there, his face made of stone.

A cold autumn breeze blew through the hollow, and Techno's hair danced across his face, stirred by the wind.

It was. . . . peaceful. For all the unease Levi felt, with a broken leg and stranded in an unknown location, there were these handful of moments where he felt safe and calm. An emotion that was startlingly unfamiliar.

Of course, that's when the shaking started. At first it was a low rumble, barely noticeable, like when a wagon ran over a stone pathed street and you could feel the vibrations in the soles of your shoes. It felt no different than when the wind shook the trees. Then, it got more intense, a shaking feeling that you took notice of

In an instant, Techno was up on his feet, the sleep gone from his eyes. He strode out of the hollow, and out onto the branch. He looked down, his eyebrows raised in surprise.

"Uh, Levi, you know a lot more about titans than me," Techno said, it wasn't a question, "So I might be wrong, but they can't climb, right?"

Levi inclined his head.

"Ah, okay. Well one is."

"Goddess damn it," Levi swore, "Abnormal." Like a super abnormal abnormal. Even the weirder fuckers generally couldn't climb. Even they were too stupid for that. It meant that this one was very, very smart. Smart meant dangerous.

"How much time do we have until it gets up here?" Levi asked.

Techno hummed, "At the pace it's going at now? I'd give it a minute and a half."

Levi gawked, "What the hell are you just standing around there for? Get your ODM gear on, you fool!"

Techno looked away sheepishly, "Uh, about that." he rubbed a hand along his arm, "It still takes me five minutes to put the gear on."

Levi sucked in a long breath, "We're going to die."

Techno whipped his head around to glare at him, "Sue me! It has a lot of buckles. Like why do you even need that many-"

A loud rumble cut him off.

Techno looked back down, "Oh he's like, right there."

Fucking shit fuck. Okay, calm down, Levi's survived worse. He could survive this too. Broken leg or no.

Techno walked back into the nook - at a pace that was *way* too leisurely for the current situation - and grabbed his weapons, their cold metal glinting in the morning light.

Then , he walked back out onto the branch, taking one last glance at Levi.

Oh no, oh hell no. That madman was not about to -

He got a lazy salute and a grin before Techno hopped off the branch and plummeted to earth.

Goddess *damn it.* Techno was Levi's only hope of getting home and now he was going to die. And then *Levi* was going to die.

There was a roar, a pause, and a crash. After a second or two, the noise resumed. There were several loud, booming sounds echoing from the ground up to the tree.

What on earth was going on?

Levi crawled from his bed, dragging himself out onto the branch. The tree shook from *whatever* was going on down there, and Levi was made acutely aware of his lack of ODM gear. He looked down, the ground was a frightening distance away. Beneath him, monsters clashed.

Techno was using his axe and sword as a grapple along the titan's body, carving himself handholds to launch himself from and maneuver from. But the titan was smart, scarily smart, and could predict his moves with ease. Levi watched with a horrified fascination as a Techno launched himself at the titan's face and *punched it.* He was even more horrified when it *worked,* the head twisting to the side from the blow.

A hand grabbed Techno and before he could cut himself loose, hucked him across the forest. Techno twisted himself in the air, using his momentum to throw himself to the ground then slammed his axe into the earth. The move slowed his momentum so what would have killed him only succeeded in getting him away from the titan.

Then, Techno did the unexpected. He laughed. Wild, erratic, laughter. It wasn't quiet nor shy. No, it was so loud Levi could hear it from his perch on the tree. As Techno laughed a countermelody to his song arose. Softly at first, in a hushed whisper and in the susurration of the wind he heard it. Thousands of voices, laughing with Techno.

The titan, as perturbed by this as a beast could be, let out a low whining sound. Reptilian in nature, it was full of clicks and snaps. Huh, Levi never thought he'd see the day where he saw a titan scared.

The titan looked at Techno, then up at Levi. Levi could practically see the gears in it's head turning. It still wanted to eat, but well, one human was closer and stranded, and one was far and deadly. The choice was easy to make.

Within a second, the titan was already scaling up the great tree with bloodthirsty vigor. Branches shook and leaves fell with each heave of it's massive body.

Shit, shit, shit. Levi scrambled back into the nook. The entrance was too small for the titan's hand, and while it wouldn't stop it, it would hold the titan off. Hopefully for long enough for Levi to strap on his ODM gear. Fighting with a broken leg was better than not fighting at all.

The tree shook again, and Levi's legs slipped from the branch. He clung on for dear life with his hands. Thank goddess for his strength or he would've fallen. He hauled himself back onto the branch and continued his path to 'safety'.

But, before he could reach the nook, a clear, cutting voice filled the air.

"Hey," Techno said, a grin in his voice as he scaled the massive tree, swift as an arrow, "Your fight's not with him." He had reached the titan now, "It's with **me.***"

Blood splashed across Techno's face as he severed the achilles tendons. Like Icarus with melted wings, the titan fell to earth.

The larger they are, the harder they fall.

Techno fell with it, using the body to cushion his fall.

Then, he laughed again. That low, bloodcurdling chuckle that sounded so much louder than it was. The sound filled the empty space and echoed through the forest like a chant. The leaves rattled on their branches and joined the chant.

Techno didn't kill the titan. He didn't even fight it. He *played* with the thing.

Techno made his way up the titan's massive body, leaving carnage in his wake. He cut the tendons first so the beast couldn't move, then continued his game. First, he removed it's toes, slow and sweet. Roars filled the forest with his laugh. Then, he moved up, cleaving off first the calves, then separating the entire leg from the body. Driving his sword into the titans back, Techno pried away

the skin exposing the stark white spine. Now with his axe, he hacked away at the bone, revealing the tender spinal cord. He jammed his weapons into it, watching with gleeful delight as the titan twitched and writhed. In pain, and from his command.

The beast tried to crawl itself away from Techno, it's hands scrabbling uselessly at the ground. Without its legs, it was stuck.

Techno didn't stop his work.

He was laughing throughout the whole thing. The haunting sound so much louder than the titan's cries of pain. He didn't speak, he didn't hesitate. He didn't do anything besides,

Laughing.

He continued his butchery. Except, now gone was the meticulous and planned torture. Now it was just mutilation. The sound of wet hacking filled the air.

Laughing,

Techno moved to the head, stabbing his sword into the beast's eye over and over and over, a sharp toothed smile on his lips.

*Laughing laughing laughing laughing laughing laughing laughing laughing laughing laughing laughinglaughinglaughinglaughinglaugh **inglaughinglaughing***

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Techno stopped abruptly and looked up, eyes widening with horror. Black met gunmetal grey. Techno held his gaze with a terrified expression dawning on his face. He looked down at the steaming blood on his hands and the regenerating brutalized body.

He wasn't laughing anymore.

In a frenzied haste, Techno made his way to the nape and cut it off in one, merciful stroke.

Techno returned to the tree slowly, climbing back up to the nook even slower.

He was quiet, more than usual, his head hung low.

"'m sorry," he mumbled, meeting Levi's eye from under a curtain of hair. His eyes were red.

"For what?" Levi asked, "You killed the titan and probably saved my life." Sure, he went a bit . . . *wild* with it, but who was Levi to judge.

Techno shook his head mournfully, "If you knew what just happened, you would know why I apologized." He laughed, it was not maniacal, it was not gleeful, it was grief filled and tired, "If you knew what just happened, you wouldn't be anywhere near me."

Techno bowed his head and started to make his way out of the nook again.

Techno walked out of the nook. He shouldn't have even come back up here. Why did he do that?

Levi was strong, the peregrine was a deadly force of nature, similar to himself, only minus the insanity and about 12,000 years. Maybe he could be safe. But no, nobody was safe from Techno when he was like that. He wasn't *himself* anymore. He was his titles, Blade, War, *Blood God.* Didn't matter how skilled they were, he wouldn't rest until they were dead or he was, and Technoblade never dies.

He- He shouldn't be here. Around people. Around Levi.

What if he lost control?

Blood splattered hands, sweet summer air, metallic tang with each breath.

What if he did *that* to Levi?

His feet fell faster. He couldn't get away from the man fast enough.

He needed to *leave.*

A strong hand grabbed his arm.

Techno looked back, finding Levi standing there, crutch in one hand, in his other, Techno's arm.

"Let me go, Levi," Technoblade said.

Levi tilted his head, "Why should I?"

"I shouldn't be around you right now." He said in a low, quiet voice.

"Mind telling me why you think that?"

Levi didn't know, he didn't need to know.

"It's not safe."

Levi raised an eyebrow, "Please. I could still kick plenty of ass, even with a broken leg."

"It's not safe." He repeated, voice becoming desperate.

"And I asked why."

He met Levi's gaze, "Levi, let me go."

The grip around his arm tightened, "No."

There was quiet.

Techno didn't struggle. He didn't know what would happen if he tried to fight.

"Levi let me go." He pleaded.

"No."

"Let me go."

"No."

" *Please.*"

"For what reason?"

Techno tore his arm away, " *You saw what I did!*" he snapped, *"You saw what I could do! What I'm capable of!"*

"What? Killing a titan?" Levi asked, "Hate to break it to you, you're not special."

"You saw how I lost it, Levi!" Techno shouted, "You saw what happens when I lose control!"

"Control of what?"

"Stop!"

"Control of what, Techno?"

"Stop it Levi!"

"No, tell me. Control of what?"

"Myself!" He exclaimed. He was panting, hard. Techo swallowed, then said it again, softer this time, "Myself."

Levi, for once, didn't say anything.

"Don't you see," Techno said, gesturing around him vaughly, "I'm dangerous. I'm *crazy!"*

"You're not crazy."

"Oh? Aren't I?" Techno laughed bitterly, "We all know what you think, what everyone thinks! What's true! And you don't even know the half of it!"

Levi put a hand on his hip, "Then tell me."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because it doesn't matter," Techno growled, "You saw! You saw what I did! What I can do when I snap! It could be you, Levi, not some titan next time. You! It could be your legs I chop off, your spine I cut open, your eyes I mutilate!"

"Anyone is capable of violence," Levi said stubbornly.

"But no one is *me,*" Techno shot back, "Anyone can decide! That's the difference! Control! I can't! I don't have it! I lose it and the next thing I know I'm coated in blood that *I didn't shed.*"

"Doesn't make you crazy. Crazy is wanting it, crazy it craving it."

He scoffed, "Then I'm crazy, Levi. You don't know how fucking insane that makes me! You don't know how I wake up every morning wanting to stab everyone I see through their heart, how everytime I see a bare throat my hands itch to slit it, how whenever I see an injury I yearn to make it worse! I'm crazy. My head's so fucked up I can't even remember what being normal is like!"

Levi frowned, "And yet, you're not crazy."

"How?" Techno asked, "By your definition I'm crazy Levi. How am I not?"

Levi sighed softly, "Techno, you say you want to stab everyone you see through the heart, correct?"

"Yes."

"Does that include me?"

Techno hesitated, he didn't want to say it. Some small part of him wanted to keep playing pretend that he was normal, but the cat was out of the bag now, "Yes." he admitted, "You have no idea how much I've wanted to make you bleed and cry out in pain under my hands."

"Then why don't you?"

Techno sucked in a sharp breath, "What?"

"You heard me," Levi said, "Why don't you?"

Before Techno could reply, Levi continued, "You say you want to do all these terrible things, but you don't. Why is that Techno? I'll tell you why. It's because you don't. Maybe some fucked up part of your mind wants to but *you* don't. Tell me, what do you have to gain from keeping me alive? Directions to the wall? I've told you. Help fighting titans? I'm crippled. You have nothing to gain from helping me, and yet, you do. Why?" He placed a hand on Techno's shoulder, "Because you're a good person."

"I want to kill you," Techno said. It was true. His chat was divided. One half screaming to protect Levi, the other to kill him in cold blood.

Levi looked at him, "Do you?"

His mouth moved to say 'yes' because that's what his mind, the voices, were screaming for.

But something changed. It was, . . .quiet. Only for the tiniest sliver of time, but it was *quiet.*

Quiet!

For a second, for a brief, blissful second, the voices were gone. All that was left was silence. Blissful silence, crisp and clear as a winter lake. All that was left in his head was,

Him.

"No."

Then the voices were back, just like they had always been. But with them, was still Techno, an island in their turbulent waters.

"No," he repeated, "I don't"

The corner of Levi's mouth twitched up in the barest hint of a smile, "I know."

He closed his eyes tightly, "I could kill you."

"I know," Levi said, "but I trust you not to."

A drop of water landed on Techno's hand. Was it raining? He looked up to the sky, but it was the same striking blue it always was. He brought a hand to his face. His fingers came away wet. Oh. *Oh,* he was crying.

"I have a lot to explain," Techno said.

"You do."

"Do I have to?"

"No."

A choice. He tuned out the voices and their opinions and focused on the steady rise and fall of his chest.

"Can it wait until later?"

Levi nodded, "It can wait as long as it takes. Just don't run away."

"I won't," Techno swore, " *I won't.*"

Techno picked at the bones of his meal. There was no avoiding it now. He needed to talk to Levi. He couldn't just, *not* after what had happened. Levi deserved to know.

"I think I'm ready now," Techno muttered.

Levi looked up from his own meal and nodded.

Techno drew a deep breath, held it, and let it out, "To start, I just want to let you know that everything I've ever said about myself is true. I don't know my exact age, but I'm old. I don't think this is my world. I used to rule a country. I don't care if you believe me, and why would you? I just wanted you to know that."

Techno played with a strand of pink hair, "Where I came from, I had many titles. I was called War Incarnate, I was called Death bringer. More prominently though, they called me The Blade, they called me The Blood God. They had reason to. Wherever I went, rivers of blood were left in my wake. I've started wars and ended them. I've killed more people than you've probably ever met."

"I- I wasn't always like *this,* " Techno said with distaste, gesturing to himself, "I think I had family once? I don't remember their faces nor their names. I-I think I do remember their kindness. Then after that all I can remember is *blood. Flower petals painted red, words I can't remember an **ymore, a sword in my ha** **n̶d̶̲** **—** "

His mouth clicked shut and his neck gave a harsh twist.

"I-I'm sorry," Techno stuttered, a hand at his head, "What was I talking about?

"Red flowers," Levi provided, "words you can't recall, something about a sword you were holding-"

"No he wasn't." Something said with Techno's voice. Black eyes stared down Levi, their message clear.

Levi wisely shut his mouth.

Techno blinked, his eyes were red, "Like I was saying, I think I was uh, normal once. Then it happened. I don't remember it, I just know it happened. I-I hear voices. I can't remember when they started, but I know they just started talking one day. I think they were always there, but eventually they just . . ." He trailed off, making a vague exploding motion with his hands.

"They're harmless most of the time. Just annoying. Thousands of voices in my head just yapping on about useless shit,"

Useless?! Wdym we're very helpful!

I second that!

E

He has a point. Remember the nether wart block incident?

Unsubscribed

/rainbowchat

:O how rude

Can't believe you'd betray us like that

"They're doing it right now," Techno continued, "Just complaining about stuff that doesn't matter. Sometimes though, they get angry, or bored, or anything really and they start getting restless. They-" he took a calming breath, "They demand *blood.* They keep doing it until I give it to them or until I black out. I try to manage it. I beat it back and fight against them, but if I'm stressed, or sad, or anything other than *perfectly* calm it makes them so much harder to control."

"Its- It's *terrifying* to know that at any moment I may have to fight them off, just so I don't kill my friends." Techno explained, "It's terrifying to want it. It's so, so scary to stare at someone I love, someone I would lay down my life for, and want to kill them. Because that's what I want, blood, death, carnage. A large part of piglin culture revolves around two deities. The Wither and the Blood God. Thousands of years ago I lost control, and I killed many. Overworld, End, Nether, none were spared. The Wither is the bringer of destruction, The blood God is the bringer of death."

Techno put his head between his knees, "Don't you see Levi? I'm insane. I'm crazy. I'm a terrible person. If I'm even that. All I do is kill people."

There was a long, cold silence. The kind that makes you shiver and pull your clothes tighter around you. The kind of silence you want to fill with words but are too scared to. The kind of silence that terrifies you. There was silence, terrifying silence, then-

"Twenty two."

-that silence shattered.

Techno looked up from his knees, "What?"

"Twenty two," Levi repeated, "That's how many people I've killed. I was born in the underground. Every day was a fight for my life. Sometimes, that fight involved killing other people. I've killed twenty two of them. I'm sure that's not anywhere close to your number, but it's similar." Levi reached out and placed a firm hand on Techno's arm, "I didn't choose to be born. I didn't choose

my fight for survival. I killed because it was me or them, and I don't regret it. You though? You didn't choose anymore than I did, and you spend every waking moment mourning their lives."

"I killed innocents, Levi," Techno growled, "I wouldn't spare a thought towards killing a monster, but I've killed thousands who did nothing wrong other than being in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"You did," Levi agreed, "and I won't pretend it wasn't wrong. But it wasn't your fault. You didn't choose to spend your life fighting voices as much as I didn't choose to be born in the underground. You're head's fucked up, no denying that. But you've had plenty of chances to kill me, you have had chances to wipe out an entire expedition of scouts and no one would know, but you didn't. You've controlled it. I've seen you control it. Fight it."

"Tell me," Levi said,"When was the last time you lost control and killed innocent humans?"

"Four thousand years ago," Techno supplied. He still remembers it like it was yesterday. Since then, he had done everything he could to control himself around people. He lost control with bad people, sure, enjoyed the screams of traffickers, slavers, murderers, but he hadn't killed an innocent since. Oh, he'd wanted to. Many times. But he never did. He's done everything not to. His legs bore numerous knife scars from when he had to ground himself so he wouldn't. His arms had broken and bled in the place of people he didn't know.

Techno's hand ghosted to the healing scab on his cheek.

"Don't you see Techno? You've controlled it. You held the voices back. Would someone evil do that?" Levi questioned, "Goddesses, I knew you were dumb, but not this stupid. You're not the voices, Techno. How could you think otherwise?"

Levi looked Techno directly in the eye, *daring* him to argue "The only thing crazy about you is that you won't believe you're a good person."

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is 12,000ish words. I'm fucking TIRED. Next chapter might take more time. Idk. I need a break lol. Just for like a couple a' days. The reason I can get these done so fast is

because I'm literally writing the first thing that comes to mind and I do very, very little editing. So if you wanna complain about typos DONT :D

only say something if its so bad its illegible. Thank you.

How old is Techno? Undecided. Though, his estimated number is lower than it is. I was thinking about 17,000ish. He's old.

I know, you were all wondering where the soup references were this chapter. DO NOT WORRY. Soup will be back. It didn't tonally fit the chapter. Great, now I'm worrying about tone.

I wanted this to be a crack fic. Not emotions. Where did I go wrong? Fuck now I gotta write actual plot. Ugh

Anyways, Leave comments, they give me life.

Raise a Glass

Chapter Summary

hmm yes

Chapter Notes

sorry for the wait

Levi took a wobbly step through the meadow. According to Techno his bone was healed enough that he should be able to walk now, and he sure as hell wouldn't spend time just sitting around now that he could. He had *tried* to use his ODM gear, but Techno wouldn't let him. Baby steps, he said.

Tch, like Levi needed to work his way back up. He was fine now. He was healed.

Freshly fallen snow crunched beneath his boots with each step he took. Winter had arrived, the cold finally chasing out the last of summer's warmth.

A dull ache throbbed in his leg, but it felt like muscle fatigue more than anything, not pain.

Techno watched him walk from his place across the meadow, leaning up against a tree.

Levi's body begged him to limp, but he refused. He walked in straight, strained steps. He was trying to prove he was fine. He could go back home.

"How far are the walls from here?" Techno asked out of the blue.

Levi paused his walk, "400 kilometers."

"400 kilometers," Techno repeated, "That's awfully far, isn't it?"

"I suppose."

"And you think you could make it to the walls like that?" Techno asked rhetorically, "Might as well go feed yourself to the titans right now. Would save both of you the trouble."

"Techno I'm fine."

Levi stumbled.

Techno raised a brow, "Clearly. We're leaving when I say you're clear to go."

"Can I at least use the ODM gear?"

Techno held up a hand, "Absolutely not. It would put way too much strain on that leg. Do you *want* to rebreak it? Listen, I know the tree hollow is comfy, but if you wanted to stay longer you could just say so."

Levi scoffed but didn't argue, "How much longer until I can?"

"A week," Techno replied, "At least. If I say you're not ready you are not ready."

Levi groaned, "We're never going to get back to the walls at this speed."

"Believe it or not, I'm making this run *faster*. If you die, you'll never get back, and if you injure your leg again it will be another month until we depart. We can leave right now if either of those sound appetizing."

"Fine." Levi grumbled, "I'll wait."

"Good choice."

"Shut up, brat. *"*

"Never, little peregrine."

—

Levi drew a line with charcoal over the hollow's wall, "Altogether the journey should take about sixteen days. If we go through the heart of the forest it will take us an additional two. That's why we should go around the outskirts."

Techno shook his head, "The trees are sparser there. It will use up more of our gas. Most of the trip will be over open land. We need to save as much gas as possible. Walking through the middle will be worth the extra time."

"We'll still need to use gas while in the forest. The extra time will add up to more gas usage."

"The titans are more congregated around the outskirts of the forest. More sunlight. The middle is safer."

"The more time we spend, the worse winter gets. We need to be as quick as possible."

"At the cost of our lives?" Techno aked, "I think not."

"What happened to Technoblade never dies?" Levi teased.

"Yeah," Techno deadpanned, "I've lived this long cuz I'm not an idiot."

"Debatable."

"You little brat-"

"Hypocritical."

"I'm 12,000 years older than you!"

"And yet, you act nothing like it, brat."

"Oh I'll show you a brat-"

—

"Levi, give me your boot."

"No."

"Please?"

"Why?"

"Uh, reasons?"

Levi glared at him, "No."

Five minutes and a wrestling match later, Techno had his boot. And no, he still didn't know why.

—

Sewing through leather and skins is hard. Unlike cloth, leather is much tougher and thicker, making it more difficult to get a needle through. That is, if you're not Levi or Techno. Their unnatural strength made it so much easier to work with the difficult material.

Levi was sewing a pair of gloves for himself. He couldn't make mittens, as much as he wanted to, because ODM gear required you to move your fingers separately from each other. It was difficult, making gloves that both functioned and were comfortable. The task was made worse by the fact Levi was relatively new at this whole sewing thing.

Techno, on the other hand, was making a sack. Techno, who had years upon years of experience with making and mending clothes. Yep, him. He was making two pieces of skin sewed together like that was something that required his skill level.

"Oi, you couldn't have done this instead of me," Levi complained, holding his half done glove up in the air.

"Hey, don't underestimate the difficulty of making a sack," Techno argued.

"It's a sack."

"Who are you to tell me how hard this is? I don't see *you* making a sack."

"Exactly!"

—

Techno still had nightmares. It wasn't uncommon to find him thrashing and crying out in his sleep.

He would often be violent when he woke up. Confused, scared and lashing out. Luckily, he wasn't focused. Techno when he was scared was dangerous, but Levi could handle dangerous. Techno when he was focused and calm was deadly.

Levi started carrying a knife with him when he woke Techno up from his nightmares.

Techno had tried to convince him to just let him ride the dream out. Leave him alone. But Levi wouldn't back down. It was terribly saddening to see a man so strong brought so low. Levi wouldn't leave him to suffer alone, no matter how much Techno wanted him to.

Of course, he didn't actually say this. He masked his care under the guise of self serving actions.

"I can't sleep with all the noise. I'm going to wake you up, or else I'll never get to sleep myself." He would say.

"Your thrashing hit my leg and woke me up. It's annoying." He would explain.

Of course, Techno knew the game he was playing and called him out, but Levi didn't stop.

He didn't care how many knives he had to block or bruises he got in return. He didn't care how long he had to stay up by Techno's side until he was confident enough to brave the trials of sleep again. He would do it a thousand times and more.

—

Now that Levi could walk, Techno took him with him during his daily tasks. Daily was a misleading word. Nightly was better. While they couldn't see as well at night, it made gathering food and resources so much easier without the threat of titans looming over them for the most part.

Levi was keeping lookout for said titans. It didn't matter if most were asleep if the one that was awake decided to murder them.

Techno, on the other hand, was sitting in a tree. Not even a giant tree, just a normal oak.

"Do I even want to know?" Levi asked.

Techno held up a finger to his lips. *Quiet.* The pink haired man crept along the narrow branches, silent as a shadow.

Levi scoffed.

Techno continued his path along the branches, his red eyes glinting in the moonlight, focused on a target Levi couldn't see. The moon seemed to love Techno, following him like a spotlight wherever he went, casting a silver crown around his hair.

Suddenly, in a flurry of feathers and squawks, Techno pounced. Like a cat set on his prey, Techno grabbed the animal in his hands, his sharp teeth descending on the neck within seconds. With a crack and wet crunch, the commotion stopped.

Techno scaled down his tree. He slithered through the branches and down the trunk with such smooth ease it reminded Levi of a snake. A couple of feathers fell from his form as he moved. Flights and downy trailed behind him like curls of snowy ash, the feathers shimmering purple and green in the low light.

Techno dropped to the ground, landing right besides Levi. Levi made a face of pure, utter disgust. Techno looked at the scowling captain confused as to why he was upset. A dead wood pigeon hung between his teeth. With a wet sound, reminiscent of tearing fabric, Techno's jaw released from the bird, the animal falling into waiting hands. He picked a feather from his reddened teeth. His entire mouth was coated with blood.

He held the bird out to Levi.

"I caught a pigeon."

Levi recoiled, "I can see that."

Techno wiped the blood from his mouth on his sleeve.

"Your poor shirt." Levi said in a voice sadder than Techno had ever heard from the man.

"What?" Techno asked, genuinely confused.

"Did you have to bite it?" Levi asked, "You couldn't have just used a knife."

Techno shrugged, "No point in dulling the blade when I can just use my teeth. More work to sharpen the knife afterwards."

Levi raised a brow. He'd never heard such bullshit and he dealt with the Military Police on a regular basis.

Techno fidgeted, "It keeps chat calm," he admitted.

Ah, that made sense.

"But now you have to clean your shirt." Levi pointed out.

"I don't though?"

Levi glowered at him, *"You sick fuck."*

Levi was practicing walking again. Running too. Techno had said it would help rebuild some muscle he'd lost in his leg. Techno had made sure his leg didn't atrophy, making Levi practice exercises everyday when his bone was broken. But, despite his efforts, the muscle had still deteriorated. Now Levi had to work to get it back.

Levi jogged from one end of the clearing to the other.

"Come on Levi you can do it, just put a little power to it," Techno cheered in his flat voice.

"Shut up." he groused back.

"It's amazing," Techno observed, "You say that near everyday and I never listen. Do you think there may be some sort of pattern here? A trend perhaps? Precedent?"

"Don't you dare sass me, brat."

"Respect your elders, fetus."

"Elders are supposed to be wise. I see no elder here, only a fossil with a mouth far too large for his coffin."

"Chat wants me to tell you that you're a child, both in years, and in height."

"Don't use chat as an excuse to make shitty short jokes."

Techno held up his hands 'apologetically', "don't shoot the messenger."

"I will do whatever I damn well please."

Loud footsteps cut off their bickering. Two titans - a four meter and a ten meter - lumbered through the forest, taking excited steps towards the two humans in front of them.

"Hey look, they're like us." Techno said. He pointed at the four meter, "You," next to the fifteen, "and me."

"If you're talking dick size, flip it and you've got it spot on."

"Wow," Techno intoned, "and you say my jokes suck."

The titans' footsteps thundered ever closer, gurgling yawns rolling from their mouths as they approached Levi and Techno

"Oh no," Levi continued, "that joke was awful, but it's still miles ahead of yours."

"Bruuuh" Techno rumbled lowly.

A foot slapped down by Techno.

"Oi, brat, are you going to deal with those or not!?" Levi yelled.

Techno dodged a sweeping hand, "Yes yes," Leaping into the air with his ODM gear, Techno attacked the titans. He was a blur of black and pink, spinning in the move he'd picked up from Levi and tearing his way through the thick titan flesh.

Techno made a large sweeping movement, less like the flight of a bird and more like it's soaring. If Levi knew what an albatross was, he would have likened it to him. He glided, using momentum to propel him instead of using more gas. It was clever, as Techno had learned in an environment with limited resources, but it also slowed him down. Don't get him wrong, it was fast, but it could be faster. A titan hand closed in around Techno, the man having to cut through the bony appendage to get away. If he'd used his gas to turn sharply, he wouldn't have needed to.

Techno flung himself over the ten meter, catching his axe on the titan's mouth and using the leverage to change direction and slide around the titan's head. The move left him right where he wanted to be, at the titan's nape. A pained roar later, one adversary was gone, and Techno turned his attention to the next.

Not even a minute later, steaming bodies lay on the ground, Techno standing above them in victory.

"Push your ankle down more," Levi said suddenly.

Techno turned to look at him, "What?"

"You change direction too slowly. You do a good job of preserving momentum, but you need to change on a dime sometimes," Levi explained, "Once you're out of the spin move, don't be afraid to engage your ankle more. It'll make you quicker. Deadlier."

"I- uh, thank you," Techno responded dumbly.

"You're welcome."

"You're good at giving advice," Techno observed, "I didn't expect that."

Levi shrugged, Military training in the walls only covers the basics. In the field, it's adapt or die. Veterans teach the recruits. Gives them a better chance of survival."

Techno was quiet, "how many recruits die on an expedition?" he asked after a minute.

"Seven or eight," Levi responded glumly, "They just freeze up when they see a titan. We try our best to save them but," he trailed off.

"Can't be everywhere at once?"

Levi nodded, "The rates have gone down since Erwin took command. At least from what I've heard. I never served under Shadis. According to Erwin I've also helped but I can't help but feel that it's all useless in the end. Who cares if it's better if it's still awful?"

"Would a soldier die if they got stuck out here?" Techno asked. He knew the answer. He'd seen the shattered swords, the sun-bleached skeletons, the curling morning glories. But there must be some hope, some way that humanity could win. He didn't like to think the dead he'd found died in vain.

Levi's answer was a punch to the gut.

"Almost definitely," Levi replied, "I would have. Should have. But you couldn't keep your nose out of other people's business."

Techno laughed bitterly, "Then I suppose the world is better off because of nosy people. We keep the good ones alive."

Levi raised an empty hand in mock toast, his tone was somber and heavy, "Here's to joining a fight you shouldn't have fought."

Techno joined him, "Here's to surviving."

Techno was in a dark room. So dark he couldn't tell up from down or see an end to the terrain. It was an endless plane of midnight black.

He flipped around in a panic. Where was he?

His footsteps sent ripples across the inky blackness.

"Why?" a voice asked.

He spun on his heel, there was nothing there "Who said that?"

"Why?" The voice repeated.

Techno turned in a full circle, not seeing anything.

"Why?" It repeated in reverberating echoes. "Why, why, why, why, why, why, why, why, why?'

"Why?!" The voices came together in one, pure voice. It was deafeningly loud.

Techno turned slowly towards the direction of the voice.

There was a girl. Barely even half his height. She had messy brown hair. He couldn't see her face. She didn't have one.

"Who are you?" He asked

"Why don't you remember?" She said with a tilt of her head.

"Remember what?"

"Remember."

"Remember what?!" He shouted. What did he forget?

"Remember." She repeated monotonously.

A sword stabbed her through her chest. Crimson blood splashed from the wound and dripped into the darkness. No one was holding the sword.

"Remember"

The hilt was nestled between his hands.

"No," He whispered, "No, no, no."

She reached past the blade, past the guard, past the hilt and rested her hands on his, "Remember,"

"I didn't" He did.

"I didn't!" He did!

"I didn't!" He did!

***"I didn't!"** He cried, **I did,"** he answered.*

"Techno."

Techno shot up. Where was he? A placating hand was on his arm. Someone was here. He didn't have any weapons on him. A jolt of panic shot through him. *It's fine. He was fine.* He didn't need them.

He had hands for a reason.

Quick as a bolt of lighting, his hand shot towards his attacker's face. Towards a weak spot everyone had. His fingers were pointed straight, only his ring finger and pinky curled back.

But before his hand could reach its target, a strong hand caught his wrist.

Levi's eye was not even an inch away from his trembling fingers.

Techno gasped in pain.

His name was Technoblade. Levi was helping him. He was safe.

"So *that's* what you do if you don't have weapons," Levi remarked, "clever."

Techno's body went limp and he stopped struggling against Levi's grip.

"I'm sorry," He whispered, tremors raking through his form.

Levi sat next to him, placing a gentle hand across his back. Techno shivered from the touch, afraid.

"It's not safe." It was a conversation they'd had many times over.

"Agree to disagree." Levi said with a yawn.

"I could kill you," Techno said. It was true.

"Yeah, and I could blow up a bank. Doesn't mean I'm going to." Levi retorted.

Techno tucked his chin onto his knees, "Why won't I stop."

"Annoying as it is, this kinda shit is sticky. It grabs onto you and holds on tight." Levi explained, "It's like blood. You keep scrubbing but it's somehow still stuck in the goddess damn floorboards."

"I know," Techno said, "But it's never been this bad before."

"You're in a stressful environment with everything you've ever known gone. It would make sense that it is."

"I've been through worse," Techno brushed it off, "and I was never like this with Phil."

Levi tilted his head, "Phil?"

"Philza. He was my closest friend before," Techno gestured a vague hand around him, "This. We were together through thick and thin, peace and war, heaven and earth."

"Your support structure is completely missing, Techno. For heaven's sake. You've been stuck in hell, everyday a fight for your life, completely isolated for half a year. You've only regained human contact for a little over a month. Anyone would struggle with that regardless of how clear their head was before."

"I know."

"You're not weak for having emotions."

"So they say."

"It's part of getting better to feel like shit at first."

"I know Levi!" Techno snapped, "You think I don't? I've struggled with this for years! Thousands of years! Not a day has gone by where I haven't hurt! Where I haven't struggled and grieved. I've met hundreds of people willing to help! I've gone to enough shrinks to last a lifetime! They all say

the same things and it never gets better! I know every single line out of the book you're reading from! Don't you dare pretend like you understand this more than I do!"

Techno's eyes widened with realization of what he'd done, "I'm sorry," he whispered, curling in tighter around himself, *"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry I'm sorry, I'm sorry I'm sorry, I'm sorry."*

Levi poked him in the cheek, "Stop, you'll kill your vocal chords if you keep that up." the shorter man ran a hand through his hair, "You're right, you've probably heard this stuff a million times over. I'm not going to sit here and tell you what you've already been told. Why don't you tell me something about it? So that I can understand."

Techno looked at him uncertainly.

"I won't judge," Levi promised, "We're stuck in a forest surrounded by nacked man-eating humanoids. Things really can't get much weirder than that."

The pink haired hunched in on himself, "Really?" he asked, voice barely a whisper.

"I promise."

Techno looked at him, sharp eyes analyzing his face for any hint of a lie. Wanting it honestly. Techno was used to deceit. He was used to being used, betrayed, then thrown away. Not- Not being *helped.*

He didn't know what to do with it half of the time. Even with Phil it was like trying to breathe underwater.

But Phil always did it anyway. Phil cared. Phil was kind. Levi was too?

"I can't remember a lot of things," Techno started, staring at his shaking hand, "Time steals memories away like water eroding a river bank. Faces become foggy, words become unintelligible, memories become dreams. I-I can't always remember the dreams either. I wake up from them

lacking anything besides fear and sadness. It feels like there's a wall. Not even a wall, just a thin, little veil between me and the memories, but I just *can't* step beyond it."

"Why?"

"I don't know, *I just can't.*" Techno bemoaned, "a-and I feel like I'm just. . ." he trailed off.

"Just?" Levi prompted.

"Weak." Techno admitted.

"Brat, did you not hear me? Feeling emotions does not make you weak-"

"I know Levi."

Levi held up a hand, "No, let me finish. Being in pain, hurting, grieving, they don't make you weak."

"Then what does it make me?" Techno interrupted, "What else could it possibly make me besides pitiful, besides useless."

Levi looked at him squarely, "it just makes you human."

Techno offered a helpless smile, "Levi I'm an immortal lunatic that can crush stone with my bare hands. What part of that says human to you?"

"Goddesses, does everything I say just go in one ear and out the other?" Levi snapped, then sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose, "Techno, am I human?"

"I should hope so. Wait, are you like a really tiny titan or something? A dwarf?"

Levi punched him on the arm, "Watch it with the short jokes. And no. But I have freakish strength and what some would call an 'unnatural' affinity for killing. I'm still just flesh and bone."

"You can still die though."

"And? Doesn't exactly change who you are. It's just a feature. I have black hair, am I not human somehow?"

"Those don't feel like the same thing at all-"

"Tehcno just listen. You are not *weak.* You are not *pathetic.* You're *human.* "

Techno groaned, "I know."

"So what?" Levi retorted, "You can repeat it just fine, but to know and to understand are very different things. You need to believe it."

Techno let the words bounce around in his head. He didn't believe it. No matter how many times he was told. He felt weak, he felt pathetic, he felt . . . . scared.

"I don't want to go back to sleep." He admitted. He was afraid of what sleep would bring with it.

"Then don't." Levi answered simply.

"I can't stay up forever," Techno reasoned, no matter how much he wanted to, "I'm going to need to sleep eventually."

 "You will," Levi agreed, "but I'll be right beside you when you do."

Techno leaned into Levi's side, "Thank you, Levi."

"I'm just doing what anyone would do."

Techno snorted, "And I'm supposed to be the crazy one."

When Techno eventually did fall back asleep, he didn't dream. He just slept. No rehashed memories, no more torture, no more blood. Just rest.

Techno made him run again.

Run was really a subjective term, sprint was more accurate.

"Why are you making me do this again?" Leci asked. He knew, he just wanted to complain about something. It wasn't like this was especially difficult for him, more just annoying, but Techno had chased him around with a sword the last time he tried to opt out and he was salty.

"Birds can't fly with broken wings, Levi." Techno responded. He was sitting down, carving away at something. Levi would like to reiterate, that while he was *running his legs off,* Tehcno was sitting and carving for pleasure. Asshat. He knew what he was doing.

"I'm not a bird, jackass," Levi snapped back, "I'm a human."

A curl of wood fell to Techno's lap, "Bird, human, it's so hard to tell at my age."

"I know you're an old fuck but I know you ain't senile."

Levi slowed down to a trot.

"Oh come on, I know you can do better than that," Techno said, still looking down at his carving. Magic. It was magic, no other explanation. Great, now Levi had to burn his friend at the stake because he was a witch-

Wait.

Friend? When did he start thinking of Techno as a friend?

"Hey, I can see you're still jogging." Techno said, "Do you want to use your ODM gear or not?"

"Oh come on, I've been running for the past fifteen minutes, don't we have anything else to do-"

Techno started drawing his sword.

Levi began sprinting again, "Fucking fine! Christ, how much of this is for my own good and how much is just your sadism?!"

Techno very pointedly did not reply.

Techno dreamed again. This time when Levi woke him up, Techno got him. It was nothing, really, just a shallow cut across Levi's palm.

Techno had stopped sleeping with weapons, well aware of the threat he posed when frightened and armed. In response, during his initial panic, Techno had got creative. Eyes were a big target, the throat another, Techno lunging at him with flashing teeth and wild eyes, the frightened man had even tried to break his arm once.

This night, Techno had spotted the knife Levi carried with him. In a flash of steel Techno yanked the thing from Levi's side and promptly tried to murder him with it.

He was able to grab Techno's hand before he got to his intended target, the jugular, but it wasn't without cost.

Levi looked down at the bleeding cut on his hand, a small price to pay for ended suffering. For Techno though? Levi knew it would hurt. If Techno knew he'd actually harmed Levi, no matter how panicked or afraid he was, it would destroy him.

It was an easy decision to make. Without a second thought or a single word, Levi twisted his hand into the dark fabric of his cloak, letting the blood soak into it, despite the disgust it caused him.

"Are you okay?" Techno was worried, still frantic from his panic. His hands fluttered around Levi's form, dancing over his body but never touching. He was too afraid to.

"Fine." Levi said gruffly. His hand stung.

"It's not safe."

"I know."

—

Techno surfaced from under the water, looking like a corpse. His hair splayed around him, falling over his shoulders like a waterfall. Only his eyes and the top of his head poked out of the lake. Crimson burned hotly with hate, despite the frigid temperatures.

"Oi, brat. You alright?" Levi asked. He sat, warm and clothed on the side of the lake.

Techno rose so that just his head was above water. He groaned, *"It's cold."*

"Yeah. No shit. It's winter."

"Why do I have to bathe in the ice water," Techno's head snapped over to him, anger painting his features, "I can't feel my toes. Heck! I can't feel my legs!"

"It's either this or I shank you in your sleep."

"I wasn't even that dirty!"

"You were covered in blood, you cretin!"

"And?"

"I cannot believe I live with this!"

"You can go live with the titans if you feel so inclined, asshat!"

A beat.

"SHUT UP CHAT!"

—

"What happens if I can't fight anymore?" Levi asked suddenly. Night had long since fallen upon him, but sleep had not. He stared at the wooden ceiling, his gaze raking over the wood grain, eyes trailing every little path that shot through the wood like rivers.

"What do you mean?" Techno's voice answered from the dark. Sleep was a fickle thing for both of them these days.

"What," Levi sighed. He shouldn't even be talking. It was stupid. It didn't matter. Why the hell should he tell Techno anyway? *But-* Techno trusted him. Would it kill to trust him back? "What if I can't kill titans anymore. What if I'm useless in a fight?" He asked.

Techno hummed, thinking it over, "That would be too bad I guess."

"You guess?"

"I've lived a long time, Levi. I've seen thousands of warriors, soldiers, masters of the blade. I know what talent, what art looks like. It would be a shame to see that go, but," He shrugged, "I've lived long enough to know there's more joy to life than just fighting. If you can't fight, then you'll do something else."

"So you say."

"So I do," Techno affirmed, "Believe it or not, during a reprise from the voices, I became a potato farmer. Was a damn good one too."

"You?" Levi chuckled, "A potato farmer?"

Techno nodded, "Yep."

"Why'd you quit?"

Techno paused, "I suppose," he said slowly, "That I had nothing else to do. I couldn't stay away from battle, from blood. It's where I belong, like a fish and water. I have never been more than a sword, Levi. A blade unused will rust. I fight, or I die. It's just what I'm here to do. Point me at a target, take aim, and let me fly."

"And what if you could no longer do that?"

"Then I suppose I would be useless."

"Then wouldn't that make me useless?" Levi asked, a tinge of worry working its way into his tone, "Back in the walls I'm called humanity's strongest. I'm a weapon against the titans. That's my purpose. Wouldn't I be just as useless if I could no longer do it?"

"Nah," Techno droned, "You ain't like me, little peregrine. I've been fighting for too long. It's all I know. Can't teach a dog new tricks. You though? You've got your entire life ahead of you. If you can't fight, you can do something else. Be a baker or something. I don't know."

Techno ran a hand through his hair, disturbing the silver crown the moon adorned him with, "Be happy. If you wanna lay down your weapons, do it. Don't let anyone say you can't. I've seen men, women, children, countries die for freedom. Why do you think that is?" Techno asked, "Because freedom is something we all have, and what everyone tries to take away. Don't let them, or you'll lose everything you have. Fly, little peregrine, don't let them take your wings."

"Fly," Levi repeated, "And what if I can't do that? What if something happens and I can't use my ODM gear anymore? What then?"

"You will fly," Techno promised, voice serious, "I swear. You will fly."

Levi didn't feel there was room for argument, so he made none.

—

"What are you doing?" Levi asked.

Techno paused his work, looking up at Levi. Around him was the disassembled parts of his ODM gear. It looked like a crime scene.

"The weight limit is going to be a problem for our trip. With the addition of my armor, I need to be as light as possible to carry food and gas" Techno explained, "Since my weapons don't easily damage I don't need the blade box thing-"

"That's not what it's called."

"- *and so,*" Techno continued, his eyebrow twitching in frustration, "I'm just going to get rid of it."

Levi nodded, "Makes sense. Carry on."

—

Techno's new odm gear was, to put it simply, a disaster. A really *good* disaster. It looked ramshackled, scraped together by someone who only vaguely understood it's mechanics - who knew why. There was no viable explanation for that. None whatsoever - anyone who got trapped in that thing would probably die. It had no replacement blades, altered buckles, confusing straps, it had everything except functionality. Any person who tried to use it would get eaten by a titan or kill themselves by accident within a minute. That is, if you weren't a homicidal lunatic with pink hair.

To Techno, what was a death trap was his perfect set of ODM gear.

As Techno put it "a disaster for a disaster. Two wrongs make a right."

After the removal of the blade box he attached the gas containers to his thighs. Leather straps held them fast against his legs, the cylinders pressed flush against him, unmovable and secure. They wouldn't come off even after he died.

It also made Techno incredibly light. Levi knew that when they actually had to make the journey he'd be weighed down by their provisions, but for now Techno was functioning with only half of the ODM gear's total weight. This in turn, made him incredibly fast. Faster than before. Now he was just a blur in the air as he flew. A flash of netherite and death.

Techno landed beside him on a branch, blood steaming off him in large grey plumes.

"Nice gear you got there," Levi remarked.

"Oh, uh, thanks," Techno rubbed his arm.

"It's almost as good as mine, but I can't be sure. Want to compare sets?"

"Levi," Techno warned.

"Of course it wouldn't be a fair contest if no one modled mine," Levi continued unabashedly.

"Levi."

"What! Is it so horrible to want to leave this forest? My leg is healed!" Levi snapped.

Techno scowled. He blinked, long and slow. He vaguely reminded Levi of a tired parent being dragged around the market by their kid.

Without so much as a word, Techno flipped him. Levi's back hit the floor before he even registered what was happening.

"Ow!"

His 'injured' leg was held aloft, fingers prodding along it in an aggravated manner. Remember when Techno's care was gentle? Yeah, Levi did. He missed it.

"It's been a month and a half, Techno. Even for a compound fracture this is too much." Levi complained, "I should be able to use my gear by now."

After a particularly hard poke, Techno dropped his leg. The limb fell to the floor like stone in water.

"Fine."

"Come on! It's had plenty of time to heal- wait did you say yes?"

"Yes," Techno bit out.

Levi didn't even bother hiding his smirk.

It didn't last long. A boot was thrown at his face, hitting it dead on. Levi picked it up. It was that boot Techno asked to borrow a while back. Except now, it was reinforced with a latticework of metal strips. The metal was black, probably from being forged. Speaking of which, how the hell did he do that?

Levi didn't get to finish that thought before his ODM gear was dropped into his lap.

"Get dressed." Techno ordered.

Who was Levi to say no?

—

Levi strapped on his ODM gear for the first time in months. The familiar leather straps felt like strangers, hugging his form in a way that was so foreign to him now.

"What's the saying again? The clothes make the man, right?" Techno mused from his place next to Levi, sitting down on the branch. He swung his feet back and forth lazily. A smile quirked to his lips, "Although, I'm not sure if it's entirely applicable to you."

"Yeah," Levi agreed, "It's gear, not clothes."

A wave of a hand, "Semantics."

The tree swayed gently, the leaves stirring in riot, rattling like wooden shutters on a windy day. Cold air breathed over the duo, painting cheeks and noses a rosy red, bitten from the cold. Levi was ever grateful for the deerskin cloak with it's embroidered peregrine.

Levi looked down.

From the branch they were standing on to the forest floor was a tremendous drop. A height that seemed so miniscule only a month and a half ago now seemed dangerously daunting. Levi no longer knew security in his flight, he'd been grounded far too long. Flying seemed like something he'd forgotten. He was worried his wings had shattered.

Damn, Techno had *even him* making bird metaphors now. Levi needed to nip this in the bud, lest the insanity spread. Soon, if not properly treated, Levi would be comparing the confident flight of a hawk to the brevity of the Scouts, waxing poetry about the stars and about sacrifice. Techno wasn't crazy, but no one who spoke like that was entirely sane either. Like seriously, it should not be possible to fit five bird references into one conversation and yet Levi's seen Techno do it.

His hair brushed across his brow with the breeze. It had grown long. He'd tried to cut it with a knife but all his efforts had yielded a blocky, uneven mess. He'd chosen to let it grow rather than being faced with the grievances of cutting it.

"Afraid?" Techno asked, stirring him from his thoughts.

Levi huffed, "In your dreams."

"Don't be."

"I'm not."

Techno looked him square in the eye, his crimson irises with a draw that Levi couldn't help but submit to. Techno's eyes flicked over him, sharp and analyzing, a frown adoring his lips.

"You will fly, Levi" Techno promised after a moment.

Techno grabbed his arm firmly and stood.

"Techno what-"

Before he could finish his sentence the madman jumped from the branch. Jumped, hand still grasped tightly on Levi's arm. He jumped, taking Levi with him.

They plummeted to earth, birds with broken wings, a fallen star, Icarus in elation. Their metal gear glinted like sterling silver in the winter sun. Bright and burning in their fall.

The ground raced towards them. Levi panicked. How did he fly again?

The ground came quicker and quicker.

Cables shot out with a hiss, Levi flipped in the air and righted himself, swinging away from the ground in the nick of time. He climbed in flight, launching himself to the sky in a series of sharp turns.

The sky came closer and closer.

Levi survived, Levi remembered, and Levi soared.

The whining of metal wires alerted him to a presence on his flank. Levi turned just in time to see Techno arrive at his side.

"Techno what the fuck-!" He started to shout, but stopped suddenly.

Techno was smiling. Not a reserved, gentle smile, not sorrow ridden, not boastful and broad, nor a mischievous grin. No. A smile. Wide, bright, joyous. His eyes crinkled around the edges, so full of happiness it looked like it could just leak out, like tears. There was something else there, relief? Content? Pride? Levi couldn't tell. But it was joy.

"I told you," Techno said, voice soft as fallen snow, "I told you you'd fly again."

Levi was left speechless for a second, searching for words to say. A quip perhaps, those always worked. He searched for a sassy remark or a biting lash but came up empty. He realized, perhaps belatedly, that he didn't need one.

Levi just smiled. A small thing, but a smile.

Twin stars danced through the forest, birds in flight, Icarus humbled.

—

Techno secured the last of their bags to his form. Techno was big, tall, broad, muscular, but with their luggage he became *huge.* Levi was dwarfed by comparison.

" *Tch,"* Levi tisked under his breath, *"Tall people."*

They had spent the past week practicing with their ODM gear. Levi getting back into the swing of things and Techno under the private tutelage of Humanity's Strongest. He was just correcting the small thing Techno did wrong, nothing big, but still an improvement. Techno was an excellent student, listening to Levi's advice and adjusting himself accordingly. His only fault was his sassy mouth. Other than that, under Levi's guidance he was able to improve rapidly. Levi should charge.

Between practices they prepared for their trip. There wasn't much to do as they'd been steadily working towards their departure from day one of Levi's stay. It was just finalizing travel routes and packing. If Levi was being honest, he thought they were skimping out on the food department but with the limited weight capacity they needed to if they were to bring the appropriate amount of gas.

Techno adjusted the bags with a pop of his shoulders and a 'hup'.

"Ready to go?" He asked.

Twenty days. Twenty days through titan ridden territory. Eleven through infested forest. Nine of them through open planes.

"We're going to die." Levi said in response.

Techno didn't even blink, "I'm going to take that as a yes," with that, he started walking away.

—

The two of them sat up in a tree, Beneath them titans clawed at the trunk, waiting mouths open and ready. Gleaming teeth and crazed eyes faced them.

Levi was upset.

Upset that he was eating cold, hard jerky.

It was like eating leather he swore. Worse honestly. They had mixed the deer jerky in with the bear stuff, so it was a gamble to see what you got. Deer wasn't too bad, bear on the other hand was awful. It was simultaneously gamey and chewy, *an incredible combo* . Not even the good kind of chewy like in a steak, no, a coarse, fibrous, chewy texture. It sucked. The second he got back to the walls he was eating a proper meal. Well, actually, he was going to take a bath first. Bath, then food.

"It's not *that* bad," Techno gripped, gnawing on his own piece of bear jerky diligently.

"12,000 years have killed your pallet, huh?" Levi sassed him.

"You can eat the hardtack if you want."

Levi ate his jerky without another word of complaint.

Techno scaled up the tree with nothing more than his sword and axe. Between his teeth was a limp rabbit.

"What is it with you and putting animals in your teeth," Levi grimaced, "It's gross, brat."

Techno sheathed his weapons and dropped the rabbit. He wiggled his empty fingers.

"No hands," he explained.

"Wow," Levi said, "That's the first time you've actually given me a real answer to that question."

"Hey, watch it with the sass, little peregrine." Techno pointed a warning finger at Levi, "I could easily stop hunting and make sure we only eat hardtack and jerky. It was a pain to find a rabbit in it's winter coat in the snow. Time I could spend doing something else."

Levi's eyes narrowed, "Speaking of time, you know this would've gone a lot faster if you'd used your ODM gear right? "

"Waste of gas."

"It wouldn't kill you to use a little bit."

Techno chuckled, his hands skinning the rabbit with ease, "You know one day, you'll thank me for being so cautious."

"I'll die before that day comes."

"You'll live because that day will come, " Techno corrected.

"Brat."

"Peregrine."

Walking in a straight line was impossible with Techno. A squiggle or a zigzag would be much more accurate to describe their path. Techno would not use gas unless absolutely necessary. Even if the jump from one tree to another was short, Techno wouldn't have it. He'd find a way around somehow, even at the cost of their time.

It honestly kind of annoyed Levi. Oh he understood what Techno was doing. Gas was precious. Unlike back at the nook they didn't have a wagonful of gas, they had as much as the two of them could carry.

Still, he was allowed to be upset when what should've taken a minute took ten.

Time was precious, and Techno threw it away.

In battle the two of them fit together like puzzle pieces, dispatching titans with ruthless efficiency. They didn't need to speak, they knew what they were doing. When one drew back the other was already on the attack, tearing into flesh and sending a shower of red rain into cold air.

Out of battle? They were good most of the time. They worked together, understood each other, respected each other and enjoyed the company. They were friends. Good ones at this point, much as Levi loathed to admit. You try living in a forest, spending every living moment with an admittedly

nice - *annoying* - dude and not at least getting a little attached. However they still butted heads. This was one such time.

Levi wanted to do things quick, efficiently.

Techno liked to plan, to ensure victory, success.

Levi would not die out here, he refused it. The longer he was away from the walls the more chances he had to die. He needed to get back as soon as possible. Erwin, Hange, everyone, they thought he was dead. It perturbed him more than he would like to admit.

To Techno, victory was assured in going slowly. Meticulously. Over prepare and dominate. Leave no room for disruption, error. That meant taking the long way. That meant more time.

Opposing ideals.

On the sixth day they got into an argument.

They should have been just over halfway through the forest by now but they were barely a third.

It was ugly. Things were said that shouldn't have been. It had started mild enough, but quickly escalated. Techno was timid at the beginning, but his anger steadily rose to a boiling point.

"I'm trying to save your life!" Techno shouted.

"You're damning it, not saving it!" Levi hissed back.

"Without me you'd be long dead by now! Why can't you trust I know what I'm doing?!"

"Without you, this expedition would have never happened. I would have never been stuck out here in the first place."

Techno dipped into a mocking bow, "Oh I'm *so* sorry your highness. I should have never tried to survive, that was my mistake. I'm so so sorry that I wanted to live. *I'll just go off myself!* "

"An entire squad died because of you!" Levi accused.

"They came of their own violation. I had no knife to their throat!" Techno bit out in return.

"That blood is on your hands!"

Techno laughed, bitter and low, " *It always is!* "

Levi growled, "You're so obsessed with survival you risk the lives of others in turn."

"You chose to come, I didn't ask you to. The fault isn't mine, *peregrine.*"

"This is all your fault."

Techno exploded, "That's what they always say! It's always my fault. I've followed the orders of kings, emperors, presidents, *to a tee* . Down to the letter! The second it all comes crashing down I'm the scapegoat! The Blood God, how horrid! A monster!"

"Maybe they had a point!"

Techno's eyes bled black, a hand gripped at his pommel, " *Maybe they **did.**"

Levi drew his own sword, "You're crazy!" he spat.

The second the words left his mouth Levi regretted them. Techno's expression shattered. His eyes split back into a starling white and red. Pure, utter hurt painted his face.

"Techno I- I didn't mean it," Levi stammered, "I'm sor-"

"No, no," Techno waved him off, refusing to meet his gaze. His voice wasn't angry. It was soft and vulnerable, "You- you're right. I-" his voice choked off. A tentative gaze met Levi's before flitting away.

"I should go."

"Techno-" but the man was already retreating.

But no, Levi wasn't letting him get away. He knew he'd come back, sure, but he wouldn't let him go in the first place. It wasn't right.

Levi caught Techno's arm firmly.

"Levi, it's fine," Techno whispered.

"No," Levi said, "It's not."

Techno was still for a moment. Then he began to shake in anger. Levi braced himself for a strike, but didn't raise a hand to defend himself. He deserved it. Awaited it.

But it never came.

A soft, quiet sniffle came from Techno's hunched back.

Levi untensed, "Are," he placed a hand on Techno's shoulder, "are you crying?"

Techno choked back a soft sob, "no."

"It's okay if you are," Levi explained awkwardly.

Techno groaned and turned around, "I am not!" he protested, tears in his eyes.

Levi couldn't help but smile, but quickly remembered why the tears were there in the first place and his smile fell.

"I'm sorry," he bowed his head in shame, "I'm really sorry Technoblade."

"You don't need to do that," Techno frowned, "I should've stayed calm, but I escalated the situation."

Levi frowned, "No. Don't try that with me, Techno. Don't you look into my eyes and say this was your fault. It wasn't."

"You're stressed Levi," Techno excused, "You want to go home. I'm making that go slower. You had reason to get angry."

"Don't make excuses for me," Levi said, "I had no right. I was allowed to get annoyed, Techno, upset, but I had no right to say what I said and I'm so, *so sorry.*"

"It's fine, ain't nothin' I haven't heard before."

"And that's the problem!" Levi exclaimed, "I've said something you should never have to hear. I have no excuse for that."

"It's fine."

"It's not. You don't have to accept my apology, but don't think you're in the wrong."

Techno didn't reply.

"Please?" Levi asked.

A tear slipped from Techno's eye, "okay."

"I'm sorry."

Techno sunk to the floor, eyes pinched tight, soft tremors wracking his form, " *okay.*"

In the end they came to a compromise. They would use gas for little jumps, but not long and expensive trevasses. It was no longer a last resort, but it wasn't what they tried first. Levi set a time limit of three minutes to find another way around, anymore than that and they use the ODM gear.

Techno, begrudgingly, agreed.

With that, their progress, while still slow, picked up it's pace.

Levi had always felt small. What with his height, but mostly due to the fact that he fough giant naked man as a job. That was the primary reason, not the former, *no matter what anyone else -* Hange, Techno, even Erwin on occasion - *said.*

In this forest though, Levi felt like an ant. He thinks anyone would. *Regardless of height, Techno.*

They walked from branch to branch, an infinite span of trees ahead of them. Titans pawed after them, stretching at bark and trying their damndest to get at the two of them. The beasts were dwarfed by the towering trees. Levi could lay on some branches and neither arm would reach the edge. Suffice to say they were naught but specs of dust in comparison to the deadly forest.

It made Levi think.

On an expedition, everywhere he looked was vast, stretching horizon. Prairie's of wildflowers and dancing grass, forests towering in the distance. There seemed no end. There was no limit, no boundary, no wall to hit. It made him wonder how wide the world was. If humanity killed all the titans would this infinite world be theirs? If they walked far enough would they find an edge? Did it have an end or did it continue forever?

Techno had seen the world, well *his* world. He'd told Levi of white, snow blown tundra. Ice spires stretching from earth to sky, like castles of glass. Lakes so big you couldn't see shore. The ocean. He told Levi about jungles, like their forest, but humid and hot, overflowing with emerald vegetation and exotic animals.

It made Levi jealous to an extent. How much had Techno - would Techno - see that Levi would never? It also made him curious. How many unknown things were in his own world. Could there be more than prairie and forest, city and walls. Could there be ocean, jungle and tundra that he too could see?

Levi had joined the survey corps because of Erwin, he stayed because of death. He fought out of the desire to free humanity, fought from hatred of the titans, fought to rid humanity of them. He didn't fight to see the outside world. It had always been a footnote to his mission.

Despite that, the more time he spent out here, the more stories of the world Techno told, the more he realized it's significance. Levi's mission would never change. He fought to rid humanity of titans, not to *sightsee.*

But. . .

Levi wanted to discover, Levi wanted to be shown.

The world was right there, right *here* to see.

However, survival was guaranteed in the walls. Safety was in returning home. He couldn't take on a world of titans alone, much as he would like to believe otherwise. Levi, Techno, people like them who were powerful and deadly were still, when you got down to it, human. They weren't invincible. Death was a selfish maiden with searching hands. You could only avoid her grasp for so long.

Still, Levi couldn't stop that small part of him from dreaming. Once he got back to the walls he could rejoin the scouts efforts. He could keep fighting seemingly sempiternal battle. Maybe one day, they would win. Somehow. Maybe he could see what lay beyond flower fields and towering trees.

Until then, it was one step at a time. One after another. Across branches, across forest, across plains, until he reached safety. Keep moving forward.

—

Levi shivered violently. They no longer had a nook filled with furrs and green blankets. They had the clothes on their back and whatever they could bring with them. Just enough to get by, not enough to be comfortable. Food and clothing were at bare minimum, the rest was gas. It was no use to be warm just so a titan could get its grubby hands on you.

Beside him, Techno snuggled closer into his own cloak. His own red cape was thick and wollen, but much too short for cold winter nights. Now he donned a bear fur cloak on top of his red one. Levi had stitched the thing together. Not exactly elegant thread work but functional.

Techno's reddened hands clutched a piece of wood, his fingertips turning white from how firmly he held it. His hands shook. Even he was affected by the cold.

A knife carved through the wood, the blade shaking lightly.

A puff of breath filled the air, curling from Techno's mouth like billows of smoke.

The night couldn't pass fast enough.

As much as Techno said the sun was cruel, at least it was warm

—

"Techno watch out!"

They'd been ambushed. In a sense at least, it wasn't planned, but it came out of nowhere. One second they were on the ground, filling waterskins from an icy black lake, the next they were surrounded by titans.

Three seven meters and a ten. They quickly encircled the two of them.

The ten meter swiped at Techno, hand tensed and teeth clicking together in anticipation.

Immediately, Techno was jumping back ODM gear whirring as it pulled him away from danger. But Techno hadn't seen the titan right behind him. His attempt at escape had only succeeded in launching himself in the direction of wide, yawning jaws. He didn't have enough time to redirect himself.

Levi grabbed one of Techno's wires with a gloved hand and *yanked.*

It wasn't much, but it changed Techno's trajectory enough that he just missed the waiting mouth, his form brushing past the titan's ear instead.

In a fraction of a second Techno flipped around and sliced the nape off.

Techno was back by his side before Levi could blink.

"My armor would have saved me," he said.

Levi cut at large fingers that were reaching for them, "A thank you would have sufficed."

"Thank you," Techno amended.

Levi grunted in acknowledgment.

Recovered from the ambush, they killed the titans without so much as a hitch.

The two of them made a terrifying team. Levi had never met someone who could keep up with him. Support him? Yes. Match him? No. It was nice, he had to admit, knowing someone had his back and could actually protect it. Someone solid, not weak and passing.

It was nice to have someone he knew would survive.

—

They reached the edge of the forest.

The shadowed canopy bled into a bright flowered prairie. It was an endless stretch of warm sunlit land. The longrass stirred and waved in the wind, creating a wavelike pattern that rippled across the meadow.

Somewhere, hidden by the fuzzy horizon, was the walls.

Titans wandered aimlessly across the plains walking with their disjointed gait. They were the only things to add dimension to the flat grassland.

Somewhere, hidden with certain death, was safety.

Techno leaned away from his tree, a single arm holding on to safety, feet planted squarely at the branch's base. His hair whipped across his face and back. Peach locks and blood red cloak provided a startling contrast to the soft greens that laid out before them.

Slowly, Techno lifted a hand, raising a finger to point out towards the bright nothingness.

"Out there, beyond the titans, are the walls," he said, "right?"

Levi nodded, "Out there is home."

"Home," Techno repeated, "right."

The wind danced, pink hair flared.

"No point in waiting," Techno stood and dusted himself off, "Let's go."

He began descending down the tree, towards soft grass, towards the titans, towards death.

Levi let his gaze rake over the deadly landscape, over flower fields and sunlit vegetation.

"We're going to die," he muttered.

From below, Techno laughed, "I heard that!"

—

Almost immediately, titans swarmed to them.

There was steam and blood, flowers smoldering beneath burning away bodies.

Techno got so soaked in blood Levi was starting to think it was intentional. Wouldn't be the weirdest thing he'd done. From what Techno had told him, blood calmed the voices down. Gave them what they wanted. He couldn't blame the man for wanting reprieve. Techno had described the voices as thousands of chatty strangers, nitpicking his life. Levi supposed it was like having a hundred of Hange in your ear at all times. No, Levi couldn't blame Techno at all.

Still it was gross.

Levi *would have* voiced such a fact, if not for the fact he never got the opportunity to.

After battles they kept heading east, going as fast as they could without straight up sprinting. Not even Levi had enough stamina to do that for 12+ hours with the added bonus of killing titans. He was strong, not a *god*. A brisk pace was set, but not fast enough to burn them out. They trudged through knee high grass, cutting scars through the thick ocean of greenery, paving a path with it's first set of footsteps. They pushed on and on, despite the looming threat.

The titans never ended. As soon as one was spotted on the horizon, they were sure that sooner or later, they were going to fight it and kill it.

Soon enough Levi's blades were dull. Techno shouted at him when he tried to discard the swords. Keep them, he said, they didn't have enough to do that every single day, so Techno would just have to sharpen them.

Despite their paired skill, battle was taxing. Wave after wave of titans came and died by their blade. They couldn't stop to rest, no, they kept moving, kept fighting, killing, bleeding, until the kind moon showed it's mercy. Night the only reprieve from the battle.

When Levi saw the sun sink low that first day, he felt he could cry.

One out of nine. If he just survived eight more he could go home.

Scratches and light burns littered Levi's arms sporadically, exhaustion clinging to his limbs, dragging them down, his legs burned from the walking, the running, the fighting.

Eight more days.

The sun was gone, the moon smiled at him.

She could only hold off her cruel counterpart for the night. In the morning he would rise again, death on the horizon.

"We're going to die," Levi whispered.

Techno scoffed, "You always say that."

"It's true."

"I've lived this long, Levi. This ain't gonna be the thing that kills me. I've got a strategy y'see?"

"Oh, do tell. I'm *dying* to know," Levi replied dryly.

"So let's say you're about to die, right?" Techno said.

"Yeah."

"Well, it's quite simple," Techno explained, "Just don't."

Levi sighed and buried his face in his hands, "We're going to die."

—

As much as Levi would like to say it, the first day was not the worst. No, unlike the desirable outcome, things did not level out, they did not get progressively easier, a lighter weight to bear. If anything, they got worse.

This was not to say the first day wasn't bad. It started out horrible, it just got moreso.

They had to travel during the day. Despite the benefits night brought with it they still needed time to sleep and recover. Any human would. At night they could sleep without the overbearing threat of titans, but they couldn't during the day. So, despite the challenges it presented them with, they traveled under the cruel sun through a valley of death.

At night, when most titans dropped unconscious, they set up camp and tried to sleep. One would keep guard, dispatching on the odd awake titan, the other would rest. They traded off shifts, each going for about 36 hours each without sleep before getting their turn to rest. At first, Techno was adamant about the fact that he could take more night shifts. After all, Techno had said, he'd spent his whole life fighting. He had spent weeks awake, running on fumes and still fighting, bleeding, breaking. He could take this.

Levi shut that shit down right then and there. They would trade on and off each day. That was it. The final say. After a short while, Techno caved.

The schedule was taxing on both of them. It wasn't just lack of sleep that weighed them down, but the day's activities too.

They spent more than half of their time awake fighting off titans and just *trying* not to die. For Levi at least. It honestly seemed like he was the only one who cared about that. Techno turned into a mother hen the second he saw Levi being unsafe, berating him and steadily eroding his stubborn pride until he stopped whatever he was doing. For his own safety though? It appeared Techno couldn't give two shits. The man pulled off dangerous stunts, deliberately joked around during fights, and all around gave a lackluster effort towards not dying. Levi knew that Techno was on top of everything, but it would be at least nice of him to pretend to be serious.

On the third day across the plains, the taxing nature of their journey caught up to them.

It was an altercation with a swarm of five titans. Normally, Levi could hold them all off on his own, but he was tired. He had the night shift last night. His eyes were dry and red, sunken bags hanging on his lids. He just blinked. Just for a second, just gave into the call of fatigue for a second. It had it's cost.

A titan got its hands on him. More specifically his arm. It pinched down *hard.*

A shout of pain.

Levi sliced off the enlarged fingers, freeing himself. He fell back, the harsh pull of gravity dragging him down, already preparing to correct his course. But, instead of falling through empty air like planned, he fell into a pair of study, steaming arms that yanked him away from the immediate danger.

"You alright peregrine?" Techno was covered in titan blood, curls of smoke drifting from his form as he flew.

"Yeah," He replied gruffly. He shifted in Techno's grip. His back was wet and hot. Titan blood had soaked from Techno onto him, "Ew." he muttered.

"Yeah, sorry I forgot to shower this morning." Techno landed on the ground, dropping Levi off.

"Clearly," Levi scrunched his nose.

"What are you talking about?" Techno asked, already zipping away, after the blood of a certain monster, "I am the perfect model of cleanliness!" He shouted over the screech of ODM gear and the groan of a falling titan.

Techno landed back down, stumbling a bit with the landing. He brushed the hair out of his face, fingers catching on the tangled strands, a grimace adorning his face. Blood evaporated from his form, returning his supreme level of grossness to his normal level of grossness.

Tenderly, Techno reached for his wrist, examining it with tired but focused eyes. It was already swelling a little bit, a ting of redness blushing over the skin.

Techno began to move the wrist slowly, rolling Levi's hand carefully in a slow circle.

"Tell me when this hurts."

Levi grunted.

Techno continued to roll the wrist, it wasn't exactly comfortable, but not painful. Practiced fingers completed the hand's final arc. Just as it neared the end a sharp twinge shot through Levi's nerves.

"There," He said.

Techno nodded, stopping the movement. Fingers descended along the wrist, prodding across the swollen area. They were firm, but not aggressive, like a violinist's hands along the neck of their instrument.

Another jolt of pain.

Levi hissed.

Techno looked up at him for a second, then back down at the hand. He turned the wrist over one last time, before dropping it.

"Good news," he said, "It's not broken or sprained. It'll heal in a day or two. I can wrap it and provide some support to help with the pain in the meantime. Bad news, it will still hurt and could get worse if you push it."

Levi looked down his wrist, irritated, "You're going to say 'take it easy' aren't you,"

"Of course I wouldn't." Techno scoffed, "Only a dumb person would say that and I'm a *genius.* "

"So you were."

"Yep."

Levi frowned, "No. We can't risk this, we can't be weapon down if we even hope to survive this. I've had worse." He let his arm down, "Besides, it's only pain."

Techno stared for a second, then just kind of shrugged, "I trust you. I'm not going to sideline you. I couldn't if I tried."

—

Techno stood over Levi. The voices had died down recently. Human contact was good for the psyche, who knew?

In fits of anger his bloodlust became rather indiscriminate, still leading him towards violence against Levi. He never gave in though, in spite of close calls.

It wasn't anything he wasn't used to.

Strangely though, the voices had sort of changed. They'd always had opinions, constantly giving their input on a given situation. *Lucky him.* They also had opinions of people. If they hated someone, it was difficult to be around them while voices screamed for their blood. If the voices like someone, like Phil, it made things a lot easier.

At first, the voices hated Levi. Like *really* hated him. The voices weren't particularly nice to Techno, they'd made fun of him for plenty of minute shit before. Like when he placed first in a tournament but didn't personally beat every single person in the competition. Oh no, he was just *awful* then. When he was young, it really hurt. Nothing he ever did was good enough. He could never win. With time, he'd learned to cope with it. It became a joke. Something he actually found funny and grew sort of fond of. Long story short, the voices could be assholes to him.

But, they also had a protective side. If someone really hurt Techno - not just like, beat him in battle or something - or said something really mean towards him chat *raged.* They would not stand for it. Anyone who did that was good as dead to them. Luckily, Techno had thicker skin than chat, so he didn't just kill anyone who was rude to him. He was used to it after all.

However, when Levi first met him, he'd been in a bad place. His breaking point had become very easy to reach. He was already vulnerable, and the whole 'delusional' comment only added to that. Something that he would have never paid any attention to actually hurt him. And oh, did chat not like that.

They hated Levi, and for a while they held onto that grude.

As Techno and Levi grew closer, the voices became gentler. Forgave. And wow, what a forigen concept that was from them. It reminded him of their opinion of Tommy. Divided. One side protective of his family, the other betrayed, hurt, and angry.

Now though?

The voices were completely different from how they'd been at first.

Aw, look at the shorty sleep

BROOOOO CUTE PEREGRINE

Levi :D

Friendship ended with tommy. Levi is now best friend

You say that like tommy was ever Techno's best friend

Shhhhhhhh, don't say the T-word in here!

Isn't it so sweet how much these two dorks trust each other. I DONT CARE IF ANY OF YALL STILL HATE LEVI! HE IS BEST BIRD

:O best bird levi

Best bird

E

Who still hates him lol

I do

STFU, no one asked your opinion

Seconded

Thirded

Fourthed, or is it quadrupled?

/Rainbow chat

I would literally die for Levi

Bitch, your a disembodied voice here, you can't fucking die

THE SENTIMENT CARRIES OVER

A chuckle bubbled from his throat. A quiet, huffed thing, barely even making sound. But then another came, and another, and another until Techno was roaring with laughter.

He'd spent two months fighting tooth and nail against voices just so he wouldn't kill his friend, just for them to go ahead and decide they liked him now! They could just do that! Make that choice! All on their own!

Levi stirred, "Techno?" He asked groggily, "you okay?"

Techno forced himself to calm down, trying and failing to contain loud wheezes of laughter.

"I'm f-fine," he chuckled, "I'm okay."

Levi cracked an eye open, "you sure?"

Techni whipped a tear from his eye, mouth stretched wide in smile, "I'm sure. Go back to sleep."

Levi closed his eyes, "If you say so," he murmured against the soft fur of his cloak.

Aw, cute

Seconded

Thirded

Quadrupled

Techno couldn't help the laugh that escaped him.

"Oi, brat."

"I'm sor-" a laugh.

"Techno!"

"Sorry!"

—

On the fifth day in the plains, Levi witnessed the impossible.

Techno's blade chipped.

It was a small, hardly noticeable thing. Just a quick, sharp jut inwards, almost like a serration. Still, it's impact was huge. Levi had never, *never* seen Techno's blade have a single scratch on it, let alone a chip. It was like waking up and finding out the sky was red. Unnatural.

Levi tapped Techno's shoulder, "Oi, brat. Look at your blade."

Techno raised a brow but did as he was told, "What?" he asked, "What am I supposed to be looking at?"

"The chip," Levi pointed at it, "Your blade is chipped."

Techno stared at it, "Yeah, I suppose it is," a beat, "you know, it's also black, if you find that interesting too."

"I *know* it's black."

"Oh, I thought we were just saying random stuff about it."

"Your blade never chips! It never even dulls! Shouldn't this matter?" Levi exclaimed.

Techno just kind of blinked at him. Then, slowly, a grin spread across his face.

"Oh," he laughed lowly, "You are going to *love* this."

Techno looked around the open plain, until his eyes settled on something in the distance. A titan. Four meters tall with arms so long it's knuckles dragged along the ground.

Without so much as a word of warning, Techno sprinted off to it.

"Techno wait-" Levi tried, but the man was already gone.

Levi watched, exasperated, as Techno killed the titan. Techno quickly launched himself up to the nape and cut it off in one lunge, landing with a flourish. Immediately after, he started sprinting back to Levi.

When he got back, Levi simply crossed his arms and scowled, "What was that for?"

Techno held out the netherite blade to him.

"What?" Levi started down at the sword, "I've seen your sword before Techno, I know it's black-" he cut himself off. The chip was gone. All that remained was a straight, razor sharp edge.

"No," he snarled, "No, no, no, *no!* You do not get to be a goddess damn wizard. You don't get to use fucking magic."

"Not magic. Enchantment." Techno corrected.

"Potato po-tah-to," Levi dismissed, pointing an accusatory finger at the sword, "That's fucking magic."

"Mending actually."

Levi threw his hands up in the air and walked away, "No. Just no. I am not dealing with this today."

"Where are you going?" Techno called after him.

"Away."

"Are you sure? You're not just going to mumble something about dying again?"

"Fuck off."

—

The fire crackled, spitting angry sparks out at them.

"I'm bored," Techno said out of nowhere.

"Go to sleep," Levi said back. It was Techno's turn afterall.

"I can't."

Levi looked over at him, finding eyes far too old for such a youthful face. Blood red irises tired, weary, and awake. Levi knew what Techno meant. Techno didn't sleep well these days, even as it had gotten better, he still dreamed.

Techno stood abruptly, dusting himself off and walking away from the fire, "Get up."

"Why?"

"I want to spar," Techno shot a look over his shoulder, "I can't do that with you sitting down."

Levi pointed at himself, "You want to spar with *me.*"

"No, I was actually going to go wake up a titan and ask." Man, when Techno used sarcasm, he laid it on thick. It was practically tangible.

"Why spar?" Levi asked, "If you want to burn off excess energy just run. You seem fond of it."

"I said I'm bored. That's not going to help." Techno provided, "Besides, friends spar. We should do more friend things if we're just going to die tomorrow."

Levi sighed and stood, drawing his blade.

"You wont need that," Techno stopped him, discarding his own sword.

Levi sheathed his sword, "Why?"

"I don't want to break it. Neatherite versus steel tends to end a certain way." Techno pulled a hunting knife from his belt, "Just knives and hands."

Levi drew one of his knives, dropping into a battle stance, "You haven't slept in more than a day and a half, are you sure this is a good idea? I have the advantage."

Techno smirked, "That's what you think."

Then, he sprung into action. It was like watching an arrow be loosed, or a bullet fired from a gun. Lightning fast, just a flash of action. Wind across silver grass, the moon's champion flying over molten fields.

Their blades met in the middle. To Levi's surprise, his knife shook against the steady push of Techno's.

Levi went under Techno's arm and pushed, letting the blade slip past his ear, and guiding his own knife towards Techno's throat.

Techno quickly grabbed Levi's wrist, and twisted it away from his face.

"Damn you're aggressive!" Techno laughed.

Techno's knife hand came flying back, sharp edge aimed for a slice across Levi's radial arteries.

Levi knocked the Techno's knife hand away and twisted his other hand free.

Levi was already back on the attack, aiming a vertical slash at Techno, which Techno weaved away from, slipping close to Levi, blade aimed to throat.

Levi jumped back as fast as he could, holding a defensive hand at Techno, the knife warning him away. The two of them separated and circled each other.

"You're good," Techno remarked with a smile.

Levi launched himself at Techno, both hands on his knife, aimed for the heart. Techno immediately went to cover and block the attack. Instead of deflecting the blade like Techno intended, Levi changed direction from the heart to Techno's knife and put all his power behind the strike.

Techno's knife went flying out of his hands, straight up in the air. firelight catching on the metal as it spun and flew.

Levi's knife came to Techno's throat. He did it, he won.

The knife kept spinning through the air, now coming down on it's arc.

Then,

Techno grinned.

Levi felt something shoot down his spine. Something pure and primal he had never felt with Techno: *fear.*

What followed happened faster than he could ever have imagined. Techno pushed Levi's hand away, swiping his legs out from beneath him. He held out a single hand, his knife landing perfectly in the palm. Levi's back hit grass, and a razor sharp edge pressed against his throat.

"Do you yield?" Techno asked from his place on top of hmi.

"Do you remember when you were gentle?" Levi retorted, "I don't."

"Do you yield?" Techno repeated.

Levi sighed, "Yes, I yield."

Techno got off of him instantly, offering a hand to Levi.

Levi took it and Techno hoisted him up.

"You were toying with me," Levi realized.

Techno turned his back to him, "I wasn't."

"Holding back then," Levi amended.

Techno kept walking until he reached what he deemed to be a satisfactory distance. He turned around, a sheepish smile on his face.

He pinched two fingers together and shrugged, "Maybe just a little."

Levi hummed. He'd never met a match before, let alone been bested. It was new, to say the least. To be held back on was even stranger. Levi knew it wasn't because Techno didn't respect him. Techno had a high opinion of Levi. If he didn't he wouldn't let Levi correct his form or flight with ODM gear. They had mutual respect. It added to the strangeness of being held back on.

"Don't," Levi said simply.

Techno frowned, "Levi you're injured."

"My leg is healed," Levi interjected, "You don't need to worry about that."

"And your wrist?"

"Fine."

Techno smiled gently, "You remind me of an old friend of mine."

"How so?"

Techno chuckled, "He never let me go easy on him. Didn't matter if he lost again and again. He didn't care, to him, me holding back was worse than defeat. I tried to convince him otherwise. He never listened."

"Was he good?" Levi asked.

Techno laughed again, "Like you wouldn't believe. Phil had his own epithet and everything. Angel of Death. He was skilled, deadly, incredible in a fight. He was called an angel because of his wings," Techno paused, "Oh yeah, avians exist. They're people with wings. You have to kill a dragon to get them. He had years upon years of experience. Lifetime learning to create, lifetimes to destroy. He put up a great fight, one of the best warriors I've ever faced."

Lifetimes? That was strange. Levi decided to mention it, "Was he immortal?"

Sadly, Techno shook his head, "Avians live for a long time. Forever by human standards. Hundreds of years. But everyone dies. It's just a matter of time. Everyone except, well" he gestured to himself.

"Well," Levi lowered himself into a fighting stance, "I may not be a god or a hundred years old, but I know how to fight."

Techno grinned, "That you do little peregrine."

It didn't matter if Levi failed and failed to defeat Techno that night. Skill meant nothing in the mountain of experience Techno possessed. He didn't mind. He had his small victories. A landed punch, a pained grunt, a brilliant grin. He may have well have parted the sea or held up the sky. It was victory like no other. Impossible, yet he did it.

The moon watched carefully as her warriors fought late into the night. She worried for what the sun would do to them, but worry did nothing. She knew their power. They fought with the strength of the stars and their stories. The sun ought to fear them. She believed they could cleave it from the sky.

Levi, gazing up at Techno's silver silhouette from the ground, thought the same.

If anyone could kill the cruel sun, it was Techno.

If anyone could best the day, it was a broken, battered man with nothing more than his patchwork memories and a blade.

It was a man who, while beaten down and bruised, still stood tall.

Framed in silver, covered in gold.

It was day eight.

They could see the walls.

They could see the walls!

They were a cold harsh line, cutting cruely across the open plains. The rising sun crested over the walls, giving way to long, stretching shadows. The haze of morning fog hid them behind a white screen, but they were still startlingly clear cut on the landscape. Levi could honestly break down in tears. If he was a lesser man he would've. But Levi was not a lesser man and so he did not.

Not even a little bit.

No.

Not him.

Techno stepped back, "I'm going to give you some time."

Stupid Technoblade. He didn't know anything. He didn't need time. He was fine.

He wasn't crying.

Levi wiped a sleeve across his eyes.

It came away wet.

Damn.

Levi just stood there and looked at them. Grey and imposing up close, yet so small and insignificant from far away. He'd seen them plenty of times from this angle before, watching as they faded off into the distance or staring at them with resigned relief after a hellish expedition. He'd seen them a million times, just the same as they were today, solid in the sunlight. Yet, they were so different today. Something in the way they framed the sky, connecting it to the ground. It changed.

Levi let the tears fall.

When the sun finally peaked above the walls, Techno returned. They stood, silent, as they gazed over the stretching walls. Beautiful in their reality.

"I'm not going to die," Levi decided.

"Why the change of heart?" Techno asked, "You've still got two days."

"I just won't let myself. I don't care if I have to pry myself from the jaws of one of those fuckers, or claw along the ground with broken legs. I'm not dying." Levi said resolutely, "Not when I'm so close."

"That's a big commitment."

"Foolhardy, even," Levi agreed.

"A fight you shouldn't have fought?" Techno offered.

"But we do anyway." Levi finished.

"I'll drink to that."

"You drank all of Moblit's whiskey a long time ago."

Techno smiled, "It's the thought that counts."

It was just a normal battle for them.

Five or so titans, killing their little hearts out, trudging through the fight with what little energy they could muster.

Levi thinks they were doing quite well for themselves. He wasn't in peak condition, no, but he certainly was still living up to the title of 'Humanity's Strongest'.

Although,

Levi glanced over at Techno, who was currently tearing his way through a pair of ten meters. Blood and gore surrounded him as he ripped the two of them to shreds. Techno yawned.

Yeah, maybe that title shouldn't be exclusive. Techno was a *beast.* He really wasn't kidding when he said he was good at running on low energy. Ha. Humanity's Strongest. Maybe they should start a club.

Anyway, that was beside the point. What he was getting at was that he was doing well. He was decimating the titans, winning, surviving. Until he wasn't.

Levi made an extra large arch, swinging himself up into the air, planning to catch the titan's neck on the downfall. When he began to fall, Levi aimed his grapples at the titan and pressed the trigger. Only, they didn't shoot out. They didn't fire.

In a scene that was all too familiar, Levi checked his tanks. There was no leak. He just. . . ran out.

What was worse, it was his last tank of gas.

Oh *fuck.*

Both deja vu and the ground came rushing at him.

Shit, shit, shit, shit shit, shit.

Levi was yanked out of the air. His stomach lurched at the unexpected motion.

Levi looked up at Techno, "Thanks for the save."

They landed, Techno tossing all his gas tanks at Levi immediately.

"Oi."

"I've got four canisters of gas. It's not much but it'll last you until the walls," Techno unfasted Levi's empty tanks and slotted his full ones in place.

"Oi," Levi warned.

"Two of them are partially used up, so be mindful of that," Techno pressed on, "Be sparing with it."

"Oi!" Levi snapped.

Techno stopped what he was doing, "What?"

"What about you, brat?"

Techno looked genuinely confused, "I'm sorry?"

"You can't use your ODM gear without gas, idiot!" Levi could not *believe* he had to explain this.

"Oh," Techno shrugged, "I don't need it."

With that, Techno ran off.

Levi tried to resist the urge to sigh.

He failed.

"You're being dramatic."

"Hypocritical."

"It's not too bad. It'll heal quickly."

Levi tightened the bandage, hard.

"Ouch!" Techno exclaimed, "you jerk!"

Levi did not apologize.

"You're better than this," He said instead.

Techno wasn't one to get hurt. He was strong, steady, and lasting. He wasn't supposed to get hurt. Techno wasn't meant to injure his ankle fighting a normal titan. He wasn't meant to mess up. He wasn't meant to die. He wasn't supposed to leave.

Techno sighed, "I'm only human Levi."

"But you're a better fighter than this Techno. You can't slip up, not when we're so close."

"Oh give me a break," Techno laughed, "I haven't fought without ODM gear for months. I'm unused to my previous method now. Mistakes happen."

"Mistakes that could get you killed."

Techno rolled his eyes, "Oh *please,* I'm not going to die."

"How do you know that," Levi growled, "How could you possibly know that? You know how many people have thought that? You know how many people have said that? You know how many people have died regardless?"

Techno scowled at him, "Of course I do Levi. I'm crazy, not stupid."

"Then what sets you apart from them."

Techno laid a gentle hand on Levi's, "I'm not going to die Levi. I promise."

Levi frowned, "How do you know that?" He repeated.

"Simple" Techno said with a smile, "Technoblade never dies."

Day nine.

The density of titans had increased with their proximity to the walls. In short, they barely had a reprieve from fighting them. Barely got a minute to catch their breath before the next wave came at them.

Their battle dynamic had also changed. Levi had always been more skilled at ODM gear combat, due to more experience with it, but now with Techno 'grounded' and using his old style, Levi was taking the brunt of the attack. That's not to say Techno wasn't pulling his weight. He was doing the best he could, but he was limited without his gear. He killed about a third of their total titans for day nine.

When the sun finally melted the sky down to burnt oranges and bleeding reds, Levi could just about drop dead.

The walls were so close. It would only take them half a day to reach them tomorrow.

They were so close.

"What do you want to do when you get back?" Techno asked.

Levi leaned back into his bed. It was technically his night shift, but Techno had insisted that since Levi did more work today Techno should take it. "You need to look good for the fans" he'd said. Levi had tried to stab him for that comment. He failed. Eventually, Levi ended up agreeing.

"Take a bath," he decided. He had thought about saying 'find Erwin and Hange' but a bath seemed much more appealing.

Techno raised his brows, "Really. You don't have any family you want to see first?"

Levi grimaced at the mention of family, "I don't have any."

"Oh, I'm sorry."

"Don't be. How about you? Any family?" Levi wanted to punch himself. Of course Techno didn't have a family! He was thousands of years old, his birth family was probably long dead!

To his surprise though, Techno smiled, "Yeah." he said, "They're not my actual family, but I consider them to be, though, two of them would probably try to kill me for saying that."

Levi hummed, "Tell me about them."

Techno's smile only widened, "There's Phil, which you already know about. He had two sons, Wilber and Tommy. The princes of the Antarctic Empire. I watched them grow up. They were like nephews to me. As they got older, more like brothers. Really little brothers. We were uh, close, back then."

"Do you miss them?" Levi asked.

Techno shut his eyes, "Everyday."

"What do you want to do when we get to the walls?"

"Eat some soup," Techno said dryly.

"Really. That's it?"

"I haven't had soup in more than half a year. I want my soup, Levi. I deserve it."

Levi opened his mouth to speak, but hesitated. He really didn't want to ruin the moment, but he needed to say it.

"Techno we need to talk about what is going to happen when we get to the walls."

"Oh? What is it?"

"The government in the walls isn't very accepting of what they don't understand," Levi told him, "They might try to get rid of you if they decide they're afraid of you."

"See?" Techno rolled his eyes, "this is why I hate the government."

"Did you hear me? They'll try to get rid of you!"

Techno chucked, "I'd like to see them try."

"Technoblade, this is serious," Levi said.

"Damn, bringing out the full name."

"They will try to *kill* you, Techno. You're going to have to stop talking about your age and all the stuff from your world. If you scare them, you're fucked."

"I've been on the run before."

"Yes, but I don't want you to be!" Was that such a hard concept to grasp?

Techno frowned, silent for a second, before, "Fine. I won't 'be weird'" his hands made air quotes.

"Thank you," Levi breathed.

Techno fidgeted for a moment, fishing something from his pocket, before tossing it to Levi.

"Here."

Levi caught it. He unfurled his hands to find a little carved pig. It was dressed in a fancy cape and a crown.

Levi raised a brow, "Never took you as a comedian."

Techno looked away, "I'm many things."

Levi turned the carving in his hands. On the bottom, in shaky letters, 'Techno' was carved into the wood.

"Thanks, brat."

Techno smiled in a way that was almost sad, "No problem, little peregrine."

The morning started off weird.

Techno was staring off into the distance, looking at something Levi couldn't see. It reminded Levi of when a cat would stare at a wall for no discernible reason.

"Do you see that Levi?" He asked, raising a hand to the skyline.

Levi looked out where Techno pointed. Finding nothing but empty planes and trees that faded off into nothingness.

"No."

"Huh," Techno dropped his hand, "It's probably nothing."

A couple of hours into their trip, Levi ran out of gas.

While unfortunate, they could adapt. In fact, they'd planned for this from the beginning. Levi took on and carried all of their possessions, while Techno fought. It slowed their progress, what with Techno having to defend him, but it worked.

They kept moving forward.

They were so close.

They were going to make it.

No, no, no, no! Damn it! No!

They were so close! So close. Just five more minutes, five more and they would have been at the walls.

And then in a flash of lightning, that skinless, fucking *monster* appeared. All muscle and sinew, no skin in sight. Peeking it's blood-red head over the walls. And oh Goddesses, it was taller than the walls. That shouldn't be possible! It was standing at well over fifty meters. Normal titans could only get to fifteen! Goddess damn it! This couldn't be happening. This wasn't happening.

The behemoth drew it's foot back.

No.

The foot slammed forward.

No!

A thundering boom rang out.

Wall Maria had been breached.

This couldn't be happening.

"Techno, this isn't happening, right?"

Techno stared up at the *thing,* dawning the same look of horror Levi was wearing, "It is."

Levi crashed to the ground, "This can't be happening."

Techno remained still, not even looking back at Levi, "It is."

"Damn it!" Levi screamed, "Damn it! Damn it! Damn it! We were so fucking close!"

"It's not over."

"Isn't it? The next wall is miles and miles away! That thing is going to keep going, there will be titans inside the walls now too and we have no gas! We're dead! We can't survive that!"

Techno's mouth was set in a grim line, "We will fight anyway."

"No." Levi shook his head, *"No."* he whispered again *,* "I'm tired, Techno. We've been fighting for months and what good has it done?" Levi gestured around him, "What good has any of this done? The scouts, you, me, we fight and fight against a losing battle and for what? While we lose good soldiers we gain nothing. All those people died for something they believed in, and it turned out to be a fictitious pile of shit. There's no victory in this. No end. No. I'm not fighting this, Techno. I can't. I won't."

Levi slumped down in defeat. If this was the strongest humanity had to offer it was no wonder they lost to the titans. There really was no victory. Not one he could see.

Vaguely, Levi was aware of Techno approaching him, his boots crunching the brittle grass underneath them.

Levi looked up at him, eyes tired and devoid of their usual strength. Before he could even properly see the man, sharp pain erupted along his face.

Techno slapped him.

Levi brought a shaking hand to his stinging cheek.

Techno squatted down next to Levi, grabbing a fistfull of his shirt and pulling him close.

"Coward!" he spat, "I said you could choose not to fight. I said you could give it up. I *never* said you could go back on a conviction! You promised me you wouldn't die. You said it! To give up is to die, Levi! Fight! Fight because your life depends on it! Fight, you coward!"

Techno pushed him away, "There are people beyond those walls. Look," he pointed a finger at the walls, where titans were crowding around the breach, "titans are already funneling in. People are going to die. Eaten alive. While this awful world watches. Gods are cruel, Levi, they watch us suffer and struggle against the world and do nothing." Techno hissed out "Now you can accept that and bear your neck to the guillotine, or you can fight."

"You can fight, even if you lose. You fight and tell those gods where to shove it! Gods can't control us. We choose to fight, we choose to win! We fight because we can defy their cruelty. Don't lay down and take it! Choose to fight. If not for yourself then for others, and if not for others then for

yourself. Fight because it's all you can do!" Techno glared down at him, anger burning in blood red eyes, "Fight, because the Levi I know isn't some coward who would quit just because things got tough."

Levi stared up at Techno. The sun was blocked by his figure, draping Levi in Techno's shadow, hiding him in cold darkness and shielded him from the blistering sun.

And Levi stood.

Hannes was, to put it simply, freaking the fuck out.

He was drunk, not just tipsy either. Full on drunk. It wasn't his fault! Some guys at work were having some drinks over cards. His shift was boring, they had nothing to do really, so he joined. It wasn't his fault that they offered!

Goddesses, how he regretted that now.

Hannes had seen titans, everyone in Shiganshina had. Garrison soldiers saw them on a regular basis from their posts atop the wall, and it was almost a right of passage for teens to sneak up there to catch a glimpse of the monsters. The garrison didn't even try to stop them. If Hannes was being honest, he thought it was cute, funny. Watching kids just a couple years above Eren's age sneak up the wall and proudly proclaim that they weren't scared of the titans.

But that was how it had been. Safe, atop a wall, no threat of actually dealing with them. They only knew the horrors of titans from when the scouts left on expedition, turning their heads away as fellow soldiers got devoured. Some garrison even laughing at them. "Oh, look how stupid they are! No one in their right mind would face a titan!"

Now though, seeing them face to face. Watching his colleagues die, bitten in half, blood dripping from grinning chins. Hannes was *afraid*.

So Hannes didn't fight. He ran. He needed to find Eren and Mikasa. Oh god, what could happen to Carla and Grisha.

And then a titan grabbed him, and he knew it was over. He kicked and screamed, tears flowing in rivers down his face, snot dripping from his nose. Crying and sniveling like a baby.

"No!" He screeched, "Somebody! Help me! Help me!"

But no one was going to come. The brave were being eaten and the cowards were running. He just wished he was a lucky coward. He was going to die. No ifs or buts. Damn it! He wasn't a scout! He was Garrison! He wasn't supposed to die! Not like this.

Sharp teeth separated and yawned before him.

Hannes shut his eyes tight.

Not like this!

Not like this.

The Goddesses must be real, because they answered his prayers.

Someone, *something,* saved him. Clad in midnight black armor and a tattered cape. Not unlike the kind the scouts wore, only the color of fresh blood. What was most interesting about them though, was their hair. It was pink. What the fuck? What human has pink hair?!

"Are you a god?" Hannes found himself asking.

The man shrugged, "depending on who you ask."

Out of fucking nowhere, like sleep paralysis demon, another man appeared. Hannes says 'man' but he honestly looked like more of a boy.

The man-boy came up beside pink hair and cuffed him on the head.

"Don't say that, someone is going to take it seriously," Boy-man chided.

"Wouldn't be the weirdest thing that's happened to me."

"Techno," Boy-man warned.

And wait, hold the phone, Hannes feels like he's seen the Boy-Man somewhere. Short, black hair, glare to rival Carla's when Hannes called her baby fat. Oh shit. But no, that couldn't be right. He was dead. Dead with a capital 'D'.

"Levi," The newly named Techno responded in kind.

Oh shit. Oh shitty shit shit. It was him.

"Lance C-Coporal Levi sir!" Hannes snapped to attention, saluting as fast as humanly possible, "It's good to see you are not dead sir!"

Levi turned to face him, "There's no time for pleasantries, soldier. The fucking world is ending! Are your gas tanks intact and full?"

Hannes looked down at his gear, his odm gear was severely damaged. The titan had crushed it when it caught him.

"N-No sir!"

Levi cursed and looked back up at Hannes, eyes narrowing, "Are you drunk?!"

"N-No sir!" Hannes lied.

Levi saw right through that shit, "Fucking Garrison! Go find more gas and get back into the fight!"

"B-But what about the titans?" Hannes stammered.

"Are you not a soldier?! Fight them dumbass!"

"Levi," Techno interjected, "We need to find you gas. Quickly. People are dying."

Levi shook his head, "Techno you go save them. I can handle this."

"Your gear is out of commission," Techno argued, "You can't fight without gas."

"I can survive until I get it," Levi countered, "Go. I'll be fine."

Techno nodded, "Don't die Peregrine."

"You can't get rid of me that easily, brat." Levi clapped him on the back, "No go. Be the heroic little shit I know you are."

It was chaos, pure and horrid.

The sheer density of the titans was nightmare enough, but coupled with the amount of humans running around it only added to the horror of the situation.

Any other day, Techno would have been overjoyed to see so many people. Now, he dreaded it.

For every person he managed to save, so many died. He couldn't be everywhere at once. Despite his namesake, he wasn't actually a god.

Techno ran as fast as he could - which was quite fast, mind you - snatching a crying little boy from the jaws of death. Literally. He grabbed him right as he was about to be eaten.

The boy, no older than five, was bawling his little eyes out. Techno held him as gently as he could, as he dodged and ran from grabbing hands and snapping jaws.

"Hey, hey," He whispered comfortingly, "It's going to be okay. You're safe. You're safe."

The boy paused his crying for a moment, looking up at Techno, before he began sobbing even harder than before.

Ouch.

Techno knew what he looked like. His appearance wasn't exactly, uh, pleasant at the best of times, let alone right now. His hair was pink which kind of automatically made people shout 'witch! Which! Burn him at the stake!' - to which Techno would point out that witches were female and he would be a wizard, but did they listen? No! - and his eyes were a blood red that had a quote unquote 'lust for violence' in them. Nevermind his scars. His face was one of his better areas, but it still had its share of marring, with a large scar cutting across his nose.

And that was what he looked like normally! Right now he was covered in blood and guts, his entire outfit smeared with dirt and grass stains. He probably looked more like a monster than man.

"Uh, yeah, sorry about that," Techno dodged another hand, "Hey kid, I know you're scared, but I need you to get on my back. Can you do that for me, bud?"

The kid sniffled but nodded. Without another word, Techno flipped him onto his back.

"Hold on tight." He instructed.

Techno launched them at the titan. He dug his axe into the monster's torso. The kid screamed. Techno ignored it, already climbing up the massive titan. In a matter of seconds, he was at the nape, which he promptly cut off.

They fell to the ground, Techno stumbling with the kid's added weight. The kid was still crying.

"Hey kid, it's okay. You're safe," He promised, "You're safe."

The kid continued to cry. Jeez, Techno knew he looked bad, it must be worse than he thought.

"Okay," he said awkwardly, "Let's go find your family."

The crying did not stop.

God he was not good with kids.

Though Techno did not know it, he became a legend that day. His story was passed from mouth to mouth from people he saved. They called him an angel, sent by the goddesses to save humanity. They called him a mystery, appearing out of nowhere and saving them. They called him an enigma, unworldly in his appearance, coated in blood and snarling like a wild animal, savage against titans but so gentle to people. Some even called him a goddess, if you didn't see him up close it was easy to mistake him for a woman with his flowing pink hair.

They called him many things. Angel, God, Savior. They all agreed on one thing though.

They called him kind.

Others from outside of Shiganshina would dismiss it as a rumor. Some sort of panic induced hallucination. Mass hysteria. A trick of the light. But Shiganshonans knew different. He was real, and he saved many of them.

Techno would never know it, but he was loved.

"There you go kid," Techno pushed him forward into the crowd of people. There was some sort of boat evacuation going on.

The kid looked back at him, afraid, nervous, unsure of what to do.

"Go on," Techno urged, "you're safe."

The kid looked at his feet, "I'm scared ."

Techno kneeled down and squeezed his hand, "You want to know a secret?" he asked.

The kid nodded.

"I'm scared too," Techno confessed, "I'm scared everytime I fight. But fear serves me no purpose during a fight. It's okay to be scared, but you have to be brave in the face of it. That's what bravery is. Can you be brave for me?"

He nodded again, wiping his sleeve across his eyes.

"Jonas!" A shrill voice rang out.

A woman burst from the crowd, a panicked expression on her face.

She spotted the kid immediately and raced towards him.

"Jonas!" she cried again.

The - what he presumed to be - kid's mother fell to her knees and wrapped her arms around the kid. In turn, the kid wrapped his arms around her and started crying even harder than before.

Techno, suddenly feeling very out of place, stood to leave.

"Wait," the mother said.

Techno turned slowly back around, "Yes?" dear god, he hoped he didn't do something to piss her off. Mothers were fucking *scary* when you pissed them off-

-*" You need to stop this!-"*

                    -Bloodied bodies clutched to a rising chest-

     "I'm not going to hurt you!-"

   -painpainpainpainpain-   *- how could you hurt me?!-*

-I hurt you-

                              - mom -   *- MOM! -*

-no no no no no -

-victory-   *-defeat-*

"Thank you," the mother said, snapping Techno out of his thoughts.

"Oh, uh, you're welcome," Techno mumbled awkwardly.

The mother cried and cried, "I can never repay you."

Techno turned his back to her, he wasn't uh, exactly great at dealing with other people's emotions.

"You don't need to." with that he walked away. He had people to save.

Then,

someone screamed.

Techno whipped around so fast it gave him whiplash.

The screams and whimpers spread through the crowd, along with fingers raised to the air, pointing at something. Techno followed their line to the target.

On the roof of a church there was a titan, not even 200 meters from the evac sight. It was probably abnormal, judging by the way it was crawling along the roof instead of walking. It was stalking up behind two soldiers who were only a house away. It was intelligent. Dear god.

Techno was already running.

He zeroed in on the two people on the other roof. They were yelling at each other, so engrossed in their argument that they didn't notice the stalking titan.

Techno judged the time it would take to kill the thing. It was smart, so it might put up a fight. If he tried to fight it there was a chance he wouldn't be able to kill it before it ate the soldiers. He just needed to get to them first and yank them the fuck out of there.

Their shouting escalated. The titan crawled ever closer. Techno ran faster.

As he got closer he could make out their features. One had dirty brown hair, and a brown cape, the other had black hair and a green cape.

Oh god.

Oh god that was Levi.

The titan's muscles tensed. It was going to pounce. And to Techno's horror, it was aiming at Levi.

Techno pushed himself even harder, adrenaline racing through his body, his feet falling faster and faster.

"Levi, look out!" he shouted

The titan readied itself. Levi started turning around. Too slow. *Too slow!*

Techno was almost there. He wasn't going to make it.

Then, in one terrible flash of movement, the titan pounced.

Techno collided with Levi, pushing him out of the way.

Teeth clamped down,

And Techno *burned.*

—

Levi had finally found a garrison soldier who wasn't currently fighting or being eaten by a titan. It was only because he was running away, wasting precious gas to save his own life instead of the people he was sworn to protect. He was a massive fucking dick.

"Give me your goddess damn gas tanks right now or I will fucking court martial you!"

The garrison soldier - Levi was going to call him Richard - glared at him, "under what authority can you tell me that?"

"Under what authority-?" Levi honest to got bit out a snarl, "I am captain fucking Levi you dolt!"

"Captain Levi was declared dead three months ago!" Richard yelled.

"Evidently not!" Levi shouted back, "Now give me your fucking gas tanks so I can save lives instead of you wasting them by running away!"

Richard recoiled, "I-I'm not running away!"

"Oh sorry," Levi was really getting pissed, "making a *strategic retreat* ."

"Y-You can't talk to me like this!" Richard fumed, "I'm a soldier of the king!"

"Your a fucking *garison soldier,"* Levi spat, "get off your high fucking horse and let me do my goddess damn job!"

"I said you can't talk to me like that!"

"I'm captain Levi, I can talk to you however the fuck I like!"

Somewhere, someone screamed.

Fuck! People were dying! People Levi could save but wasn't able to because this fucking dickwad wouldn't give him his gas!

Levi said as much.

"And what about me?! Huh?!" The guy was getting all up in his face, spit flying everywhere, "Doesn't it matter if I die or not?!"

A string of spit landed on Levi's cheek. Fucking gross.

"You're a soldier, we die for citizens, that's our job." Levi was trying everything in his power not to punch Richard, "Now you can go do it, or you can give me your gas."

"No!" Richard backed away.

"You can either give me your gas," Levi took a threatening step forward, "or I can take it from you."

Richard gulped fearfully. Good Levi had him. So he thought at least. Unfortunately, he was not that lucky.

"No," Richard whispered, then louder, "No! I'm not dying for a bunch of wall Maria scum! I was here to visit a friend in the garrison, not to die!"

"I'm giving you one last chance to stand down soldier!" Levi warned, drawing his blades

Richard drew his own, "I'm not dying for this-

"Levi look out!".

That was Techno's voice. Something rammed into him, sending him flying down the rooftop and sending waves of pain across his side.

Levi hit the roof with a dull *thud,* recovering and looking up as fast as he could.

The sight would haunt him for his life.

A titan closed it's jaws around Techno, eliciting a sickening crack as it's teeth cut right through Techno's stomach. Blood erupted from Techno, spreading from him like the petals of a spider lily.

The titan threw its head back, and like a bird, tossed Techno's limp body up into the air, before catching it and swallowing it whole.

No.

This couldn't be.

But it could and it was.

Technoblade was dead.

—

He was going to die.

It hit him suddenly, accompanied by the sound of stomach being cut in half. It had always been one of those impossibles. He was Technoblade, the Blood God. He didn't die. Technoblade never dies.

And here he was, in the stomach of a titan, practically cut in half.

Damn it.

His eyes fluttered shut.

He didn't have much time. At most he could hang on for a minute or two, after that, he was dead.

He felt fatigue weighing him down more and more with every new heartbeat.

Maybe,

Maybe it wouldn't be so bad to die.

He'd lived a long life. Not the best one, but it had its moments. Comforting obsidian wings, the smile of a brother, Wilber's music, Tommy's laugh, joy, victory, peace sometimes. Levi. Oh yes, Techno had to add him to the list. He-

Techno coughed harshly.

He couldn't forget Levi. He was one of the good moments, between the bad.

He'd seen the world and more. He'd done so many things most never would. Maybe the bill was just finally coming due.

Yes, he thought, *it wouldn't be so bad to die.*

Vaguely, he registered the titan he was inside of skidding to a halt and crashing to the floor. Someone must have killed it. He huffed a quiet laugh, *good for them.*

His eyelids felt too heavy. He didn't move to open them.

Techno thought of the silence of death. No voices, no blood to crave, no brothers to protect, no brothers to kill, no brothers to be betrayed by.

He could die happy. He'd saved Levi. That was a good reason to die, he thought.

Maybe he could stop fighting.

The voices disagreed.

Fight fight fight, they urged, *until the day you die.*

But he was tired.

Fight fight fight

Could he just rest? Let him go. Let him die.

Fight fight fight

Thousands of voices sounding, thousands eyes watching, thousands of hands pushing him onward.

Techno crawled forward, his hands still in a death grip around his sword and axe.

Fight fight fight

He didn't want to.

He did. Levi would be proud. *Here's to fighting a fight you shouldn't have fought,* he thought bitterly, *here's to surviving.*   Techno cut an opening out of the titan's stomach, light spilling through the gore into the dark.

Back into the sun.

Techno continued to claw his way out, his lower half being dragged with him, only attached by the crushed remnants of his spine. He couldn't move his legs. He didn't care, his arms pulled him forward still.

The light took focus as a world. Blood coated stones, winding down through a valley of houses. Colorful stalls stood around him. A market place. There was fabric and ceramics, tools and decoratives.

An apple cart lay overturned, the sweet fruit spilling into the bloody street. He crawled towards them.

Techno reached a hand up to his ear, plucking the gold earring from it. His ear stung from tearing the metal through flesh. He picked the pure gold one. Not the one with emerald, never that one.

Golden apples could be made by anyone with the resources. They couldn't save him now. Enchanted apples, however, could. People had long forgotten they were made, as time seemed to do to all knowledge, but Techno was old, older than the stories of the stars, older than the mountains and the rivers.

You needed three things.

One, an apple. A shaky hand reached for bright red fruit.

Two, gold. Blood splattered earring, macabre beauty.

Three, the will of a god.

But Techno was only human, no matter how long he lived and how many stars he named.

His vision darkened around the edges. Burnt paper, scorching lines of ash along his sight.

Techno fought the darkness overtaking him, clutched the gold and the apple with tight fists that slowly went slack. Fight, fight, fight, till the day you die.

Apple and gold tumbled from his hands. So close. So far.

Blood God huh? What a joke.

The voices sang.

Fight fight fight, till the day you die.

An apple, some gold, a god.

Fight fight fight, till the day you die.

Techno let the dark consume him, even as gold melted and apple glowed.

Fight fight fight, till the day you die.

"Blood for the Blood god."

And even then.

Chapter End Notes

Okay I gott a do like a shit ton of HW so imma make this short

NO TECHNO IS NOT DEAD! Is there lore here? yes.

sigh everyday, we stray further from the crack fic. Damn

I was blasting evermore (from beauty and beast) like the entire time I was writing the 'death' scene. "Now I know she'll never leave me, even as she fades from view." Eh, Levi. Right. Oh yeah, he has no idea Techno is alive. BTW he's the one who killed the titan, I'll elaborate on that next chapter.

TOLD YA THERE WOULD BE A SOUP REFERENCE

What songs go with this chapter?

WASTING IN MY LONELY TOWER, WAITING BY AN OPEN DOOR- ill stop

Child, being terrified by titans and death: *cries*
Techno: Guess I am pretty ugly

OH YEAH! If someone wants to try to write a better summary for this fic than the current one please do. Mine sucks. If I like it I'll use it.

Anyways, leave comments. They keep me motivated. Makes me happy. :D Okay posting this time.

OH YEAH AND SORRY ABOUT THE WEIRD TIME FRAME! I KNOW THE SEASONS ARE MIXED UP! I FUCKED UP! SORRY!

Wow, another chapter. Cool.

Chapter Summary

   In which Techno learns how to be a parent and hates every single second of it. Also, soup.

Chapter Notes

   My shitty update time is non-negotiable.

The nameless man moved as if in a haze. It was like he was underwater, each move he made, each step he took, each breath he drew not entirely his own.

He stalked through blood soaked streets, smoke rising from his form as if he himself was on fire. Titans that lumbered too close were brought to their knees within a matter of seconds, and killed not a moment later.

The silent sound of angel song echoed through the city, harmonized in the sound of screams. They sang for blood, they sang for destruction, they sang for death.

He was trailed by blood, each footstep in his path marked by a crimson smear. Some of it was his own, most was drawn by his blade.

Netherite scraped along the stone pavement, a dull sort of scratching sound, like a beast clawing at the inside of its cage. Claws on metal, screaming for violence to satiate its hunger, blood to satisfy its thirst.

The nameless man burns with hunger.

It's hot inside him, searing want for blood. It's destroying and consuming him. Everything he once was burns under the flame of desire. Emotions smoke, hesitations blister. All he knows in the

golden glow of survival. All he knows is the singe of death.

All he knew is left in ashes.

The nameless man cries for a name.

Somewhere, far off, there is the sound of buildings crashing down. They fall to the ground with a shuddering boom that echoes through the city like the crash of a cymbal. Titans feet rise and fall, a tympanic beat that resonates with the solid chime of his heartbeat.

Above it all is the steady chant ringing through his head.

Blood for the Blood God

Blood for the Blood God

Blood for the Blood God

Perhaps that is his name, he wonders, *Blood God.*

There's a curl of satisfaction in his gut as he tests the name on his tongue. Some dark part of him purring it along with him. *Blood God, Blood God, Blood God.*

"Yes," it whispers, **"Yes,"** it sings.

Through the mist clouding his vision he can see his world. It is full of screams, cruel laughter, and blood enough to fill an ocean.

He reaches past the dark holding him down, trying to see past his own distorted vision.

The world is in bits and pieces.

The music of horror, the burning flesh he carves into, the feeling as he kills and kills and *kills* . He discovers his emotions. Elation, ecstasy, pure, unbridled joy. He's happy, delighting in every drop of pain he milks from the titans, every one that falls at his feet, every stone painted red.

Deeper than that, when he stopped looking outward and looked at himself, The Blood God found disgust. He was angry, sad, terrified.

His emotions hummed in a brisk tremolo, fluctuation between the two opposites.

He was happy-

He was terrified!

He was elated-

Angry.

Ecstatic-

Mournful.

Who was he?

His blade carved through nape after nape, blood burning his skin.

He was hungry, wanting more. He was killing animals, watching them squeal and squirm in pain. It wasn't enough. He craved something deeper. Titans lacked the ability to feel real pain. They could bleed and die beneath his blade, but they could never cry, never be terrified of him, never understand his true horror.

It wasn't enough.

Who was he?

He was cruel.

He was laughing as death trailed behind him like a shadow.

Who was he?

He was a puppet on strings. Controlled by a marionette he didn't understand. Strapped down to a table and broken with his own actions. Torturer and tortured.

Who was he?

He struggled against the darkness' grip. Struggled and fought to surpass it. Struggled to see what lay beyond the puppeteer's vision.

Who was he?!

Someone was running from him.

They were frail and weak, he could tell from their movement alone. They ushered a child along beside them, tripping over their own feet as they tried to escape him.

He stalked forward with a limping gait. He walked slow but made steady progress. No matter how fast they ran they could not escape.

The child was slow, their guardian pulled them along as fast as they could.

It would never be fast enough.

Should he kill the child first, The Blood God wondered, *or should he kill the elder?*

He imagined their screams, how sweet they would be. Terrified, pained, delicious as he killed them. He would go slow, savor his first kill in so long. Start with the fingers, separating sinew and muscle and he ripped the digits from their sockets.

Who was he?

Why did he want to do that?

He didn't want to do that?

The kid tripped and fell to the ground. The adult stopped running to throw himself over his kin protectively.

The Blood God would never understand humans.

They would sacrifice themselves for others. It's why he found them so interesting .

Netherite scraped along the ground, the sword's tip giving off sparks as he dragged it along with him.

He reached the trembling bodies, vaguely aware of the rumbling laugh that bubbled from his throat.

He raised his blade high above his head, the netherite shining in the benevolent sunlight.

The family shook and tensed preparing for the blow.

He slammed the sword down.

WHO WAS HE?!

Like birds startled into flight, Techno burst into life.

A resounding clang rang through the empty street. Deafening as netherite met stone, sparks flying in a shower of gold, the screech of metal singing to the tune of the family's shrieks.

His name was Technoblade.

He had a name. He had two brothers. He had Phil.

He had Levi

He was not cruel.

In the back of his mind, a voice chuckled softly.

You never take it lying down, do you?

Technoblade rose and threw the sword away with disgust.

He kneeled by the family, looking at them properly for the first time. It was an old man and a young boy. The old man wore a tattered old hat that covered graying brown hair. The boy had bright blue eyes and blond hair. He reminded Techno of Tommy, only so much softer than his brother had ever been.

Techno bowed his head in shame, "I am so, so sorry." he apologized.

He hadn't gone under like that in a long time. He'd come close, even passed out before. But he hadn't been at the mercy of the voices in years. The last time was thousands of years ago. When he'd killed so many that crops were watered not by rain but by the blood he spilt.

He wasn't in control. He lost control of himself and let his urges take over. He killed many, on what could only be described as a whim. It took him almost three years to reemerge from his trance.

On that day, surrounded by bloodied bodies and burnt flags, Techno promised himself he'd never lose control like that again.

And he almost did.

Who knows what could have happened if he didn't snap out of it.

Oh god. He was so close.

It was then that the pain hit.

Burning as hunger. Searing as desire. It cut a jagged line across his stomach, crippling every other sense. Bending him to the will of pain.

But Techno knew pain. It was an old friend, as known to him as the sky or the ground. Pain was a constant, binding him to earth just as much as gravity. Techno knew pain. He loved pain. He rejoiced in it in others, he resigned himself to his own. Techno could deal with pain.

He looked down in a forced calm.

His shirt was shredded and frayed, so soaked in blood that the liquid had begun to coagulate in a jelly-like substance on the fabric. Crimson dripped from him like morning dew off a spider web. The shirt gave way to reveal a rough, ripped line spanning around his stomach like a lightning bolt. It was not a cut, no. It was a serration, like a blunt surface had carved through his skin. It was a bite mark.

Memories rushed back to him.

Panic as a titan got closer and closer to Levi. Loud words ringing over stagnant air. Then, pain. Blinding pain.

He should be dead.

A hand traced the wound. It wasn't too deep. He would need stitches sure, but it didn't cut through the muscle or damage any of his internal organs. Except, it had. At one point, it had gone completely through, all the way to his spine. Even going so far as crushing the bone.

But now it didn't.

Somehow, inexplicably, he had survived.

It shouldn't have been possible. There was no viable way he could have survived. Even if he'd had access to his entire stronghold, not a single healing item in it could have saved him. It was too grave an injury.

None except-

Techno cast the idea away. That was impossible. You could only find enchanted apples in old ruins these days. There wouldn't be one in this world either. And he couldn't craft one; he wasn't a god. He was mortal, no matter how much he pretended otherwise.

So then how?

Another scream sounded.

He looked at the family. The kid was crying and screaming in fear. For a second, Techno thought it was because of him. Then, a large shadow fell over them, accompanied by the sound of rumbling.

Techno slowly turned around, his stomach sinking.

There, looming over them, was a fifteen meter.

It was an ugly one too, sunken hollows for eyes, and an enlarged head. Spit drooled from its mouth and down its chin, like the grossest river Techno had ever seen.

It just kind of. . . stood there. Staring at them. The world frozen in place for a brief, horrifying second.

Then it moved.

Techno dodged the hand that crashed down. He grabbed the family and pulled them with him just in the nick of time.

Damn it! It was quick!

Techno dashed across the street and grabbed his sword. As much as he wanted to, he didn't fight the titan. The family was too close and could easily be crushed in the fight. Normally he would be able to take it down before that could happen, but he neither had functional ODM gear nor was in peak fighting condition. He couldn't risk it. More than that though, Techno was *afraid.*

He was too scared to kill again, all too aware of the chanting in his head.

So, Techno ran.

Without so much of a word, He grabbed the kid, slung him over his back, snatched the grandfather by the arm, and ran. As fast as his legs could carry him. Ignoring the pain that laced every step, Ignoring the blood that fell from him, ignoring the tears he cried.

The kid stopped crying, so afraid he was scared to silence. One hand was clutching Techno's tattered shirt and the other reaching for his grandfather. The elder was stumbling along with them, not nearly young enough to keep up with Techno's pace.

Techno just kept going, rounding block after block. Trying to find that evacuation point again. He shut his eyes tight and twisted his mouth shut, even as the family shouted and screamed.

"I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry," he muttered.

The streets were pathed in blood. It didn't evaporate.

He wasn't running through a city. He was running through a graveyard.

A titan popped out from a turn, jaws open and ready to close around them. Techno rolled away just before they snapped shut. Grandfather and kid groaned in pain, but Techno didn't have time to check on them. He dragged them along and he stood up again and ran.

He cast a glance over his shoulder towards the titan. It sneered down at them as they ran. From its mouth hung a limp woman, her blood dripping down it's teeth and painting them a pinkish red. Worst of all though, she was still alive. Eyes rolled up towards him, pain filled and pleading. A single hand reached out at him.

Techno turned away.

He didn't have the time. He didn't have the luxury. He didn't have the strength.

Because that's what Techno has always been. Buried beneath the victory and the battle, the tournaments and boast, the blood and violence, was a terrified, weak man.

Weak, *weak, weak!*

"I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry," he whispered.

The world bled and burned around Techno, falling into oblivion with the soft flutter of ash. The sun was bright in the sky, smiling so sweet at the sound of silenced screams. Death hung over the city like a thick fog, suffocating. In the middle of it all, Techno ran.

—

Levi wrapped himself in his cloak, pulling the thick cloth tight over his shoulders.

There was a certain numbness that came with death. Somewhere, between the anger and sadness lies a sort of apathy. Like your mind couldn't quite comprehend what had just happened, or refused to acknowledge it. It was like the world ground to a halt in your head, but kept on spinning on normally.

That's what really did you in. While you cracked and crumbled, the world kept on turning, because no matter how dire the situation, no matter how many people had died and no matter how awful or cruel it could be, the next second always came. And the next, and the next and the next until soon you had a minute, an hour, a day, a month, a year. Until it's been damn near a decade and it still hurts as if it was just yesterday.

And sometimes it's just a second. Sometimes you're sitting on a boat, running from the hoards of titans pouring into the wall. Sometimes it's just one single moment playing over and over again in your head on loop. Sometimes it's just a man who made a sacrifice. Sometimes it's an asshole who was too caring for his own good.

The killer though?

The more times Levi thinks back to his picture perfect recollection of the scene, the more he notices. Just the small details. The way a bird flew away just as the titan pounced. The way the rafters of the church groaned under the pressure of the monster. The way Techno looked at him in his last moment.

The fucker had *smiled*.

Like he was doing Levi a *favor*. That bastard just *had* to let him stay alive. Like the torture of living was better than death. Like he was glad he did what he did. Like he didn't know how cruel he was being.

Like he didn't break a promise.

He said he'd make it back safe too.

Look where that got them.

Oh, and that had pissed Levi off. As the next and next seconds came after the bite, fury and crushing misery hit him like a tidal wave. He'd kicked Richard in the balls and ripped his gas off him.

He'd killed that titan. That's all there was to it.

He didn't scream, he didn't cry. He just stared blankly down at the weak little thing that had dared to steal someone away from him. He'd been angry and lost before, and it had done nothing to help. By now Levi was conditioned to loss.

Besides, Techno wouldn't have wanted him to cry. He'd have wanted him to keep fighting.

So Levi held his tears, and he fought.

He helped evacuate citizens, he killed titans, he saved soldiers. He fought his damndest. He fought like he was Techno, a wild beast contained in the body of a man. He fought like the moon against the sun.

But it wasn't enough.

How could it be? How could anything ever be enough? In the face of inevitability there is no winning. You cannot fight against a river, only resist for so long.

So the military changed focuses. It wasn't about winning - with titans it never was - it was about surviving to the next second, minute, hour, day, year. It was about saving people.

Levi stared at his blistered hands. A combination of titan blood and friction on his sword handles had caused the skin to burn and tear in a pink, patchy pattern. Blood had oozed from the wounds and pained his rough skin a sort of reddish yellow.

Levi felt cold. Like it hadn't really set in yet. Technoblade was dead. He knew that. But he didn't believe it. He couldn't die. He wasn't supposed to die. He wasn't supposed to leave Levi behind. He was supposed to be strong. Unlike his mom, or Isabel and Farlan, he was gonna be able to survive alongside Levi.

And he left.

It hit him.

There would be no more wonky carvings or bandaging cut fingers. No more stories about the gods and their heros. No more dry spit roast rabbit. No bird metaphors or dramatic language. No more dumb jokes or deapan remarks. No more caring red eyes or steady presence at his side.

Technoblade was gone, and all that with him.

Levi pulled the carving Techno gave him from his pocket. The little crown-wearing pig seemed far too jovial for him right now. He traced a thumb over its rough edges and careful lines. Gently, Levi

flipped it over, revealing the shakily carved 'Techno' in the wood.

The man who gave this to him was dead. The man who carved 'Techno' with an unsteady hand was gone.

Levi screamed in fury.

—

The boat was so packed you couldn't move at all.

Each boat was stuffed with as many evacuees as possible then immediately set sail. They didn't have time to worry about the ones they left behind, they just had to hope they could catch the next one, but everyone knew that soon there wouldn't be another boat. Some people were going to be left behind.

The rest were already dead.

Families clutched each other close, hands flying over each other like their grasp was the only thing keeping their kin from leaving them.

Some people didn't have families. There were mothers with vacant faces. Horrified kids who were barely old enough to drink. Children reaching for a hand to hold that wasn't there, blood splattered across their cheeks. Some cried, some were too afraid to do even that.

Everyone had everything else to worry about than him, and still he could feel the stares.

Who was this armor clad man, who was dressed more in blood than clothes? Why was his shirt torn and stomach bleeding? Why did he carry pitch black weapons?

They stared at him and whispered underneath their breath.

Techno didn't understand. He wasn't the only one covered in blood. He wasn't the only one with grave injuries. He wasn't the only one with weapons.

Techno remembered how the kid, Jonas was his name if he remembered correctly, had cried when he'd seen him. His unnatural appearance tended to induce fear in others. Blood red eyes, pale skin, pink hair. It wasn't exactly familiar, and what wasn't familiar was scary.

Techno had learned to shrug off the fear long ago. Let them fear, let them curse his name or drag him through the mud. He couldn't be bothered to give a shit anymore.

But he didn't want the attention right now. He wanted to disappear and pretend like he wasn't the monster he was. He was just some average joe with brown hair and brown eyes who was terrified like them. Terrified of monsters, not terrified of himself.

He knew he couldn't control his appearance. He couldn't just wake up and decide he had blue eyes or something. He could at least conceal it though.

Techno gathered his hair in one hand. It was stained with soot and dust, and the ends were coated in his own dried blood.

Without so much as a second thought, Techno flicked a knife from his belt and cut it. He tossed the freed locks overboard and watched with an almost mournful sort of gaze as they sank beneath the churning water.

Then, Techno grabbed the tattered remains of his red cloak and tied it over his head, so it concealed his pink hair. Once he was off the boat he could blend back into the crowd. He didn't want to scare these people anymore than he already did.

Techno lifted his head to the horizon. He watched with a heavy sadness as the city he'd failed drifted further and further away.

It was a retreat. It was a loss. If there was anything Techno had learned from war, it was the taste of defeat, and more than that, how to rise from the ashes. Defeat was not the end. There was always

something after the end, always another page to turn, another year to live. The only true end was death, and by god, Techno was still alive.

He was still alive to lose. He was still alive to win. He was still alive to fight.

There, on a ratty, crammed boat, so surrounded by loss that you could choke on it, Techno made a vow. He would not stop until he won, until the titans knew the hopelessness that humanity felt.

For the first time in a long time, Techno, not the voices, not the darkness in the back of his mind, not anything but solely *him,* wanted *blood.*

Techno raised his knife to the city, where he could still see light spilling in from the breach.

Watch out world. Technoblade had declared war.

—

"You met him?!" Hange exclaimed.

"Yes, I met him," Levi responded.

The room was cramped. Barely even large enough to fit one person, let alone three. It wasn't more than a refurbished broom closet. The only piece of furniture was a rickety old table covered in dust. It made Levi want to hurl.

Light streamed in through a yellowed window pane, catching the floating dust in the air and casting them in a rich gold.

"The Angel of Shiganshina," Erwin muttered to himself, "He's real. We need to keep this confidential. A man who came from outside the walls is alive and real. The government will want to kill him."

"We already knew he's real Erwin! We've known for damn near a year! That's not what we should be focusing on! What's important is his strength! Did you hear the reports from survivors?!" Hange laughed, "They say he could lift collapsed buildings and break titan bones with his fist!"

"We don't know how much of that is just rumors, the effects of trauma and such," Erwin shook his head, "We can't trust solely on the word of panicked evacuees. Not even Levi can do that, I doubt any human can-"

"He could," Levi interrupted. Under the folds of his cloak, he rubbed his thumb over a carved pig. Back and forth, back and forth, in a soothing motion. "I saw him do it."

Erwin walked close to him, leveling him with a pleading gaze, "Levi please, we need to know more about him. He could help us win the war against titans, he could help us retake wall Maria."

Levi bowed his head, "He can't."

"You don't know that Levi!" Hange jumped in, "He could be part titan or something, that would explain his strength! Imagine the scientific progress we could make if we had him!"

Erwin ignored them, "Levi, he is possibly the greatest key we have to winning this fight."

"Was," Levi corrected.

That gave Erwin pause, "What?"

"I said was, damn you!" Levi snapped, "Listen for once instead of spouting your idealist bullshit! Techno *was* going to be all that but now he can't. Dying tends to do that to a man."

"He's dead?" Erwin furrowed his brows, "But there were reports of a pink haired man on the evacuation boats."

"And there's a report right here, saying I watched him get bit in half and *swallowed.*" Levi spat, "He's *dead,* Erwin. Give it up."

"Still, you must have spent time with him. You were missing for three months."

Levi laughed coldly, "I was and I did, didn't I?"

"Then *tell us something,* Levi," Erwin began pacing, "even if we can't use him as a soldier he could provide us information about the outside world. Men die but knowledge lives on. He's left us so many questions. Surely you must know some answers."

"I don't."

Erwin locked eyes with him, "Try."

Levi smiled, the corners of his mouth wobbling as he struggled to hold them up. A tear stung his eye but he didn't let it fall.

"There's nothing to say," he said, "He was just a crazy man I met in a forest."

—

The world seemed bleak.

It wasn't just the grey sky, or the weeping drizzle, or even the cooled wind. It was in the people.

Techno found himself in one of many refugee camps. They were no more than abandoned warehouses with broken roofs and sagging beams. Inside, every square inch was covered in bed rolls and what little personal items the refugees had.

The camps were positioned right outside open fields, putting the Wall Marian's right by their only job now: farming. It was a cycle. Wake up at the crack of dawn, labor in the fields until the sun sank well below the sky, sleep, and start all over again. Everyday, everyone clung to the slim hope for food or better lodging, but food was sparse now, a home even more so.

At the beginning, the citizens of wall Rose tried to accommodate the evacuees. Afterall, they were all fellow humans, but within the span of a month, as Techno had seen time and time again over his life, their cruelty came out as soon as things got hard.

When food grew rarer and rarer, a clear divide was made. The citizens of Wall Rose, who were well meaning, hard working folk, and the Wall Maria refugees, the greedy, uncontributing, flea ridden dirtbags. Within a month, they were seen as less than human. No better than the pigs they tended to.

Souls were crushed under this harsh mill. These poor people, a lot of them kids, had seen horrors unimaginable, and when they finally made it to safety, they were treated like the monsters they fled from.

Techno saw people with empty eyes and vacant movement, like they were barely a person anymore. He'd only seen that kind of look on soldiers before, stuck in a trench, a limb gone, utterly and completely hopeless. Like they had given up on life itself.

Techno couldn't blame them, when life had only dealt them bad hand after bad hand.

There was nothing to be done. There was nothing Techno could do. He was a soldier. He fought, he killed, he won wars. He didn't know how to fix this. You *couldn't* fix this. You couldn't go up to a mother, her hands empty where her son had once been, and fix her. She was broken, and there was no remedy. Perhaps she could keep living, but she would always be cracked.

Techno had managed famines before, but that was as the ruler of a nation. With a wave of his hand, he could set something right. Now all he could do was pick up a spade, and till a field.

So Techno fell into the crowd, fell into sorrow, and he worked.

—

Technoblade was a dangerous man. Armin knew this. The problem was no one else did.

He'd met him on the day of the fall, and Techno had tried to kill him. Or he tried not to kill him? It was very confusing. The main point was that Armin had seen what Techno could be like. Terrifying and driven by the sole need for violence.

Before Techno had turned his ire towards them, Armin had seen him killing titan after titan. He'd seen him in the midst of battle and seen how efficient and ruthless he was when he was killed.

Techno was a killer, Armin knew that.

But no one else did.

Everyone knew of Techno, a gentle guy always willing to lend a hand, but no one *knew* Techno. No one could see beneath the surface.

No one stopped to look too closely at the quiet man who worked in the fields. To everyone else, Techno was just a strange man with a strange name. He was strong as an ox and quick with a joke, yes, but he wasn't anything remarkable. He was just someone down on his luck.

But Armin knew better. He saw how Techno carried himself with a lethal sort of elegance. How he scanned a room with sharp eyes when he entered. How he always carried a sword on him, hidden by a dust grey cloak.

No one knew how dangerous Techno was, and Armin didn't tell them.

Armin had heard stories of the Angel of Shiganshina. Who hadn't? A person - gender varied from story to story - in a faded red cape with pink hair who killed invading titans and saved people. The story was overshadowed by the Colossal Titan and the Armored Titan, but it circulated in smaller circles, namely survivors from Shiganshina.

Nowadays, the quiet man always kept his hair covered with an old red cloth but Armin had seen it before. It was pink. It didn't take much to put two and two together. Techno was the Angel of Shiganshina.

It confused Armin. First impression wise, Techno was violent, volatile, cruel. But, Techno had also saved Armin and his Grandpa. It just didn't make sense. It was too contradictory.

"We should tell them," Armin glanced over to where Technoblade was helping a group of people move some heavy equipment.

"We've talked about this Armin," his grandfather warned.

"They deserve to know."

"If Techno wanted people to know he would tell them. He covers his hair, why would he do that Armin?"

Armin looked away in shame, "because he doesn't want people to know."

His grandfather nodded, "exactly, it's not our secret to tell."

"He tried to kill us!"

His grandfather cuffed him over the head, "He saved our lives, Armin. Now I cannot explain why he did what he did, but has he done anything like that ever since?"

"No," he mumbled.

"Then you understand."

Armin shot another glance over to Techno, where he was laughing with the same group from before.

He was so kind sometimes, and yet he could be so cruel.

Armin was terrified of Technoblade, but no one else seemed to be.

But, well, if he wasn't hurting anyone, what was the harm in letting it go?

—

There wasn't enough food. Obviously.

They were paid in dirt poor wages and had to buy back the food they themselves grew. There was never enough for everyone, and Techno had seen a boy, just a boy, barely up to Techno's weist in height, be beaten black and blue over a single stolen potato.

Techno could feel his face growing gaunt and the beast of hunger clawing at his stomach. He saw the people he'd worked hard to save withering away, starvation thinning their bodies down to skin and bones, barely more than a walking skeleton.

Occasionally, Techno would see the blond haired boy and his grandfather around. Any time that occasion arose, Techno power walked away. Nope. No. Nuh-uh. He'd rather almost die again. That seemed preferable.

It wasn't that Techno was scared of them. No, he was afraid of himself. He still dreamed at night, voices in his head ringing loud as he shot up and gasped for air. He still caught his gaze in a reflection and saw black eyes staring back. He still found his hands itching to unsheathe his sword and paint the earth red.

He was terrified of what he had almost done to the family and he was terrified he would do it again.

But from what little of them he'd seen, they'd been getting weaker. The old man in particular. He was probably starving himself so his kid could eat. Humans and their hearts.

Techno didn't want to see them die, he realized. He'd seen what hunger does to people. How first it takes your body, then your soul, then your life. He didn't want to see that happen to them. For some inexplicable reason, he wanted to help them.

Maybe it was guilt.

Maybe it was a sense of responsibility.

Maybe he just wanted to.

And it wasn't like Techno wasn't starving either. He felt more tired and lethargic with every passing day. He needed another source of income.

It wasn't hard to find one.

All you had to do was wander into enough dark alleys, looking hungry and desperate, but like you could throw a punch. Soon enough, some slimy man would walk up to you and say

"You hungry boy?"

Techno turned his head slowly. He didn't respond to the 'boy' comment. Afterall, he'd been treated like a young man his entire life, despite the fact it couldn't be further from the truth.

"I might be," he admitted, casting a glance to the man.

"The farms not paying you enough eh?"

"No," he said, "I suppose they're not."

The man rubbed his hands together nervously, "You look like a fighter kid. Good build, tall, bet you have some muscle from the farmwork."

"Cut to the chase," Techno snapped. He'd done this song and dance a million times. He acted just like they wanted.

The man smiled, "Good spirit too." he pushed a slip of paper towards Techno, "There's this small group I'm a part of right? Little show we put on. Lot's of Marian's such as yourself do the fighting. Lots of wall Rose folks doing the paying. All you gotta do is rough your opponent up a bit, and you'll get your pay."

Techno knew from experience how fighting rings actually were. The man made it sound a lot better than it was. 'Rough up' meant kill or beat within an inch of their life. And the pay? Shit.

But,

It was better than nothing, and that's what Techno had now.

So he grabbed the slip of paper.

"I'll see you there on Tuesday."

The man laughed, "I'll put my money on you Mr. . ." he trailed off.

Techno sighed. He hated the name, but all his other epithets were worse. With a small eye roll and a small grumble he said, "Blade."

—

There was a loaf of bread and a wedge of cheese on his bedroll.

Armin blinked, rubbed his eyes.

Nope, it was still there.

"Eren? Mikasa?" He called out, quickly getting his friends' attention. They scrambled over to him, Eren raising an eyebrow, Mikasa staying as impassive as ever.

"I'm not hallucinating right? There's food on my bed isn't there?" Armin asked.

Eren visibly brightened, "There is!" He grabbed the bread and cheese, already splitting it up into thirds.

"Eren!" Armin shouted, "We don't know if that belongs to someone!"

He looked around hastily, making sure no one else was around. The only other person in the warehouse was Techno, who quickly looked away. Armin was sure he wouldn't say anything, just as Armin hadn't.

Eren shoved a portion towards Armin, "It was on your bedroll."

"Someone might have misplaced it." Armin argued, "We shouldn't eat their food! What if they find out and they get angry?"

Seeing that Armin wouldn't take the food, Eren handed the portion to Mikasa, who began nibbling away at it quietly.

"It's their fault for misplacing it then." Eren bit into his own food.

"This is stupid. We shouldn't be doing this."

"I agree with Eren," Mikasa piped up, "It's on your bed. It should be for you."

"You always agree with Eren," he whined.

"Cuz I'm right."

"This is a bad idea guys."

Eren held out the last of the bread and cheese to him. "Eat it, or I will."

Reluctantly, and with a sigh, Armin took the food. This was going to come back to haunt him, he was sure of it. Soon someone would come on howling about their missing food and they would pay the price for taking it.

He was sure about it.

But it never happened.

No one came. No one yelled. No consequences were had.

Armin thought it would be a one time thing. He thought they'd gotten lucky. Afterall, who would be so lenient about food at a time like this? But the next day, when Armin stumbled back to his bed after a day of back breaking labor, there was another deposit of food on his blankets. This time, a small piece of cured ham.

What.

Same as the day before, Armin, Eren, and Mikasa split it. He'd tried to get his Grandfather to eat, but he'd refused, insisting the kids needed it more.

And it just. Kept. Happening.

Day after day, small portions of food appeared on his bed. Sometimes it was clearly bought, such as a bread roll or a sausage, sometimes it was hunted, like a spit roast rabbit, with bite marks deep around its throat.

By the third time, Armin realized it was intentional. Someone was feeding them.

This would have normally made Armin extremely uncomfortable. Now though? It was just a convenience. Something he grew to depend upon. How could he hate it when he saw Eren and Mikasa's faces fill out day by day, color returning to their skin?

What it *did* do was confuse him. Why? Why would anyone willingly give up food? You were lucky if you got to eat every other day, let alone every night? Why would someone do that?

What was weirder, was the fact that the amount of food increased. Soon there was around three times the amount from before. Almost like the person was accommodating for the extra mouths to feed.

It made no sense. It was a mystery.

But well, Armin had always been attracted to mysteries.

He just needed to solve it.

—

The roar of blood was loud in his ears.

The voices were suspiciously quiet now. He supposed they were saving their strength. Once the battle began they came out in full force.

Techno thumbed over the wooden mask he had carved. It was a boar skull, painted a stark white and coming down right above his mask. It was similar to ones he'd worn before. Techno had adopted this sort of pit fighting persona before. He knew the tricks of the trade. When you got down to it, the brutal battles of gladiatorial pits and pit fights were in reality, a show. People liked to be entertained.

So, Techno made it entertaining.

He wore masks, he taunted opponents, he played with them.

He gave himself intrigue, captured the audience's interest. That's how you made money in pit fights. You put on a show.

Whether that involved killing your opponent, or putting on a boar skull, you did it.

Cheers and clapping filled the air. The crowd went rabbid after the last battle. Techno looked through the bars to see the loser getting dragged away, his body leaving a bloody smear on the pavement.

He was alive, just barely. The loser had been a kid, the winner hadn't. It was a thirteen year old boy versus a thirty year old man. With food on the line, neither had held back. It was more like a dog fight than a fight between men. Within minutes, the boy was no more than a bloody pulp.

A hand fell to Techno's bare shoulder. He didn't wear armor to the fights. He trusted himself enough to fight without it. Besides, it wasn't allowed. Neither were any of his weapons. Instead they gave both combatants a knife and let them go at it.

The man who recruited him - Techno had learned his name at some point, he just forgot it - smiled.

"I put a hundred on you tonight." he said.

Techno hummed, "bring it up to one-fifty and give me twenty percent."

"That's an awful lot of money, Blade."

Techno put on a sleazy grin, "it's an awful lot of blood."

The man laughed, "You drive a hard bargain, I'll give you that. Deal."

"I expect the full payment," Techno reminded him. The man had tried skirting out of paying him, banking on the fact that he didn't know math. A lot of people from Wall Maria didn't. Unfortunately for him, Techno was not from Maria, not that he knew that.

Metal screeched and chains groaned as the gate was opened to the arena.

"Of course, of course," the man promised, "that is, assuming you win."

Techno twirled his knife absentmindedly between his fingers, "I always do."

Techno pulled his mask over his face, and with that, he strode out into the arena.

The light was brighter out here, causing him to squint and shield his eyes.

Around him, the audience cheered.

Blade! Blade! Blade!

They bounced and hollered from their seats, excitement buzzing through them with the promise of an appearance from him brought. There would be blood tonight, and it would be beautiful.

The announcer's voice rang through the ring.

"Tonight we have a very exciting fight! The up and coming Shredder versus our reigning champion," he paused for dramatic effect, *"The Blade!"*

Techno inwardly scoffed. The dramatics of it all. It was quite clear who he was, the dramatic pause was really just overkill.

Still, he had a job to do.

Techno gave a large spin, arms spread wide as he faced the crowd. The crowd went wild.

His opponent entered the arena. He was an older man, Techno would say late thirties. He was rather short, but built well and stocky, unlike the half starved refugees Techno had fought before.

More noticeably, however, was the fact he was wielding two knives. Both of them were five inches long, with serrations running in jagged lines down the edge.

Technoblade narrowed his eyes. Of course. Of goddamn course. They'd gotten bored, so they were trying to make things interesting. This was a slippery slope. Who knows what he'd have to deal with next.

But that was for the future. Right now, Techno had a job to do.

It was time to make some money.

"What's this?" he asked the crowd, slowly raising his blade at his enemy, "it looks like I have to face a man with two knives. Is that fair?"

The audience began booing and shouting a resounding 'no'.

"I know you're upset," he soothed them, "I know."

Techno paced around in a large arc, "I won't let this ruin your night, my dear audience. We wouldn't want this fight to be boring because of some unfair advantage would we?" He smiled, time for the kicker, "How about this? Since my opponent already has two weapons-"

Techno tossed his knife to the ground, the blade burying itself deep in the pavement. The crowd gasped.

"-I'll make this fair, and get rid of mine," he laughed, " *now* this is a fair fight. I wouldn't want to be too harsh on the dear Shredder now would I?"

The crowd burst out in laughter. *Blade, Blade, Blade.* They chanted.

The Shredder growled, brandishing his knives towards Techno. He almost felt bad for him.

The announcer began counting down, signifying the beginning of their fight.

Techno closed his eyes for a blissful second, centering himself. His name was Technoblade, and he was a warrior, but he was not a puppet. He had control.

He repeated it like a mantra in his head.

Technoblade was in control.

Trumpets blared as the fight began.

Techno was in control.

Knives danced in the low lamplight, Techno weaving between them easily.

He was in control.

Blades clattered to the ground, blood with them.

He had control.

Techno kicked the enemy across the arena.

Hold control.

The voices screeched.

Control.

He was on top of the enemy, fists pounding down, down, down. His hands were slick and warm and red. His knuckles split over broken teeth and shattered bone.

Control.

The fight should end soon. The fight would end soon. He didn't want the fight to end soon.

Control!

Techno pulled his fist back, rearing for another blow.

Relinquish control!

Trumpets sounded, the lights flared. The fight was over. Techno grit his teeth.

TECHNOBLADE WAS IN CONTROL!

Slowly, he rose from the bloody mess beneath him. Blood dripped from his arms. He kept control.

Techno let out a breath. He kept control. He was able to stop.

Everytime he fought in the ring, he was fighting two battles. One with his opponent, one with himself.

He hadn't lost yet.

Usually, he should face the crowd. He should gloat and stride around the arena like some sort of show pony. But Techno was tired, he had been for a long time now.

So, ignoring the audience and their dazzled cheers, Techno stalked out of the arena, blood trailing behind him.

He slipped from the light into the darkness of the cages. There was a pool of water, slightly pink already from the blood of previous fights. He dipped his hands in the cool water, cleaning off his injured knuckles. Techno splashed some of the water in his face.

He was just about to turn away when he caught a glimpse of himself in the reflection

His eyes were red, startling crimson and clear, unclouded by the chanting in his head. Behind him, there stood a man with black eyes and a sharp smile.

Then, he was gone.

Techno couldn't keep doing this.

—

It didn't take Armin very long to figure out who the mystery man feeding them was.

All it took was some well timed stake outs and a pinch of luck. Voila! Armin caught him.

"What are you doing?"

Technoblade startled, immediately straightening up and shoving the food back into the folds of his cloak. Huh, it was bread and pigeon today. Nice.

Techno turned to face him, the panic smoothed out of the lines of his face.

"Oh, I'm sorry," he said, "I thought this was my bedroll. My bad."

"You're the one who's been feeding us, aren't you," Armin accused.

"What?" Techno threw his hands down in dismissal, "Nahhhhhh, I wouldn't do that."

"It is you!" Armin grinned.

Techno completely ignored him, not-so-subtly trying to scoot away, "You guys are getting fed? Tell me where I can sign up."

"Why would you do that?" Armin asked.

Techno continued to try backing away, "Do what? I haven't been giving out food. Who has enough to do that these days?"

In response, Armin grabbed his cloak and threw it open, revealing the bread and pigeon Techno was trying to hide. As well as armor and two deadly weapons, but Armin was trying really hard not to think about the danger of this situation.

Techno screamed and covered himself with his arms like a girl who'd had her skirt blown up by the wind.

"See!" Armin exclaimed, "That proves it! You are the one!"

"I was just going to eat this on your bedroll to gloat that I have food and you don't!" Techno protested, "I was just trying to bully you! I swear!"

Armin raised a brow.

Techno deflated, "A bit of a stretch?"

"Quite."

Techno shrugged, "Well, I tried." he immediately began scooting away again, like Armin couldn't see what he was doing.

"Who are you?" Armin asked.

Techno paused his totally not running away, "Depends on who you ask."

Armin frowned, sensing he wouldn't get any information from him on that point.

He switched tactics, "Why are you giving us food?"

Techno pointed a finger at him, "Better question, why are you eating food a stranger gave you. I could be poisoning you for all you know."

"Seems a bit counter intuitive given the fact you saved my life.

For a second, Techno's eyes grew sad, before the emotion disappeared, "can't a guy just feed some kids?"

"Not if that guy is also the biggest mystery I know." Armin snapped back.

"Gods I hate smart people," Techno lamented.

"Answer the question."

"I like feeding people?"

"No."

Techno sighed and dragged a hand over his face. Armin noticed the fact that his knuckles were covered in scabs.

"If I tell you, will you leave me alone?"

Armin nodded.

"Right, awesome," Techno frowned, "I don't know."

There was a pause.

Armin tilted his head, "What?"

"I don't know alright! I just do, and I have no idea why. Maybe I'm guilty or something, I just don't know."

"That's really the reason?" Armin questioned, "You just 'felt like it'"

Techno shrugged again, "Pretty much."

"Come on, there has to be a reason!"

Techno glanced somewhere in the distance, eyes in a far off place.

"You remind me of my brothers, I guess," he admitted.

Armin perked up. Finally, some info! "You have brothers?"

"Had." Techno corrected.

Armin was silent for a moment, then, "did you lose them in the fall?"

Techno laughed mirthlessly, a sad smile on his lips "No, I lost them a long time before that. You look like a less crass Tommy and have the same annoying smarts as Wilbur."

"I uh, I'm going to take that as a compliment."

"Go for it." Techno shifted, "Can I go now?"

"I don't think I can stop you," Armin admitted.

Techno looked at him like he just had a giant epiphany, "Oh yeah." he deposited his food on the bedroll, and between one second and the next, he was gone.

Armin blinked.

Damn that man was fast.

—

After their confrontation, Armin began to see Technoblade around a lot more.

He didn't try to hide the fact that he was the one feeding them now, but he didn't just hand the food to Armin either. He still left it on his bedroll, and Techno still tried leaving whenever he saw Armin or his grandfather.

But, sometimes he wouldn't. Sometimes Armin would see him chatting with his grandfather. Sometimes Techno would break off a portion of his food and hand it to Mikasa. Sometimes Armin saw Techno listening to Eren rant about killing all titans with an exasperated expression on his face.

"Why do you talk to him?" Armin asked his grandfather one day.

His grandpa laughed, "He's an old soul. He understands us older folk."

Armin furrowed his brow, "He looks like he's twenty or something."

Grandpa shrugged, "Everyone's got their issues."

And so, with time Techno grew closer and closer to them. Eventually he stopped avoiding Armin and his grandfather, and soon they all ate meals together.

It didn't take long to realize Armin was wrong about Techno.

Oh, he was dangerous, sure, but he wasn't dangerous to *them.* What he was was damaged. It was in the way he clutched his own food tight to his chest, or always glanced over his back, or couldn't stand to look at his reflection.

With time, Armin came to realize what the real danger was.

A choked off shout rang through the air.

Groggily, Armin opened his eyes and sat up. It was dark out still, the sun just barely beginning to rise and paint the sky a pale blue. It was approaching winter again, so the air had a crisp chill to it, and he could see his breath in white curls of smoke.

Armin looked around, searching for the sound of the noise.

The only other person up was Techno, who was clutching his knees and shaking. Armin could see his shuddering breaths in little puffs of air.

Quietly, Armin got up and padded over to Techno, weaving his way through the sleeping bodies of the other refugees. Soon enough, he was standing at Techno's back. He laid a hand on Techno's shoulder, crouching down to get level with him.

"Techno?"

Technoblade whipped around, a growl low in his throat, his teeth bared and flashing in the moonlight. His eyes were dark as the dead of night, the sclera deep india ink and his irises a burning silver. Armin could never forget those eyes. Techno had worn them when they'd first met.

Armin startled back, afraid.

Suddenly, Techno's eyes widened and bled back to red. His face morphed into concern and he scrambled to his feet.

"Armin?" he asked, "What are you doing here?"

"Y-You were having a nightmare." he stammered, "I came to h-help." he tried to shift away from Techno.

"Oh," Techno whispered, a frown adorning his face when he saw the way Armin was looking at him, "You're afraid of me."

Armin didn't say anything.

"It's alright," Techno tried to sooth him, hands hovering around Armin, but not quite touching, "I'm not going to hurt you Armin. I would never hurt you."

"What is that thing?" Armin asked, voice shaking, "W-When your eyes go black? Who is that?"

And for a second Techno was at a loss for words. How was he supposed to answer a question he himself didn't have an answer for.

Honestly, he decided.

"I don't know, Armin," Techno admitted, "and I'm terrified."

Armin offered a wobbly smile, "T-That makes two of u-us."

Techno laughed.

Armin learned that Techno was safe, but deeper, somewhere in him, a monster lurked. Whenever Armin saw Techno's eyes go black, he learned to quickly get away and let Techno deal with it. When his eyes went black, the monster emerged.

—

Techno washed the blood off his hands.

They made him fight a wolf today.

He won.

The black eyed man was in his reflection again.

"Go away," Techno said.

You can't avoid me forever. It said back.

"I can damn well try," Techno muttered.

—

Mikasa was on the verge of tears.

Techno was the only one around.

Inwardly, he groaned. He wasn't good with children, why did he have to be surrounded by them? The Gods hated him, he was sure of it.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

Mikasa rubbed a hand over the red scarf she always wore, a long tear carved through the middle, "My scarf ripped," her eyes were watering.

Don't start crying, Don't start crying, Don't start crying.

A tear fell from her eye.

Damn it.

"Hey, hey, it's alright," Techno comforted her, "May I look at it?"

She hesitated for a moment, before nodding.

Techno took the scarf gently in his hands. The rip was bad, he'd give it that. Worse off, it was a knit scarf. Normally he'd just make or buy another scarf, but

"This scarf means a lot to you, doesn't it?"

Mikasa nodded.

Techno sighed, "Well, good knews, it's fixable, it'll just take some time."

"So you can fix it?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, "you need to be more careful with it though, if it means so much to you-" he cut himself off, "oh who am I kidding, it's going to get damaged either way. Would you like me to show you how to fix it?"

Mikasa nodded vigorously, "please."

Techno sighed again, "alright, let's get started."

A couple days later, Mikasa was wearing her scarf again, not a seam line in sight. Techno may have stabbed his fingers a couple hundred times to get it that seamless, but oh well. When Mikasa had held her fixed scarf between her fingers, she'd smiled so gently, so bright, so happy, and to Techno, it had been enough payment.

—

"Wait, you want to join the Scouts?" Techno interrupted.

Eren blinked, "Well, yeah. They're the only ones who can fight the titans."

Techno thought about it. Yeah, fair point. The garrison - at least the thinks it's garrison, he's been more focused on surviving than learning about the military - had been pretty useless in the Shiganshina fight.

"Does that mean you know where the scouts are?" Techno asked. He'd tried asked around before, but people either said they didn't know where their HQ was or made fun of him for being a suicidal idiot. He'd tried the same thing but instead of Scouts he asked after Captain Levi. That had gained him an even worse response.

Eren made a face, "Of course I know where the Scouts are!"

Techno brightened, "You do?"

"They're outside the walls fighting the titans right now!"

Techno sighed. So he didn't.

"Do you want to join the Scouts too, Techno?" Eren asked. And that gave Techno pause. He hadn't really thought about it. His plan - before it got derailed by a certain skinless jerk - had always been to follow Levi and help him. He supposed that's what the Scouts did though so. . .

"Yes." he decided.

Armin and Mikasa groaned, Armin muttering something that sounded suspiciously like "Great, another one."

Old man Arlet laughed.

Techno ignored it, "Why do you want to join Eren? You seem a bit young for-" men ripped apart, blood dripping down smiling chins, screams filling the air "-uh, *that.*"

The room grew quiet.

"My mom was eaten by a titan," Eren whispered, fiery hate burning in his eyes, "That's why I'm going to kill every last one of those monsters. I swear it."

"Wait, you're an orphan?"

The old man shot him a disapproving look. Techno winced at how bad that sounded out loud.

"Not that there's anything wrong with that obviously!" he amended.

It's just that uh,

Techno hated orphans.

Not for any fault of their own. It was their eyes. How clear they were, how bright and burning their hatred was. The way they looked at him, the way they *knew.* How when he stalked through desolate streets there were always orphans, eyes burning into him with the knowledge that *he* was the reason their parents didn't come home.

After everything, there were orphans. When the battle was won, and blood was split, the war over, there were orphans, looking at him, and hating him. He hated orphans because they were righteous in their hatred. He hated orphans because they were the byproduct of the worst of him.

Instead of saying all that, he simply said, "I'm sorry."

—

It was a beautiful day today. Winter had melted away into spring. The air was warm and the breeze was gentle. The grass waved in the empty fields, and wildflowers had begun to bloom.

Armin, Eren, and Mikasa were playing down in the field, flower petals turning loose in their footsteps as they chased each other around and around.

It made Techno smile.

It was easy to forget they were children sometimes. They'd gone through so much more than any adult should, let alone a kid, and still they survived. It was nice to see their entire childhood wasn't stolen away from them by the titans.

Mikasa weaved the wildflowers skillfully between her hands, sculpting the poppies into a circular crown. Techno watched with amusement as she chased Eren around, trying to get him to put it on.

Three minutes and a lot of gumbling later, Eren wore the crown. Armin wore a similar one, only his was made of fairy trumpets.

- petals painted red-

                          -poppies bleeding into the earth-   *-warm sun and burned flowers-*

                    - a small hand curled around a broken bouquet-

Techno's smile faltered.

A shy hand tapped him on the arm.

Techno looked over to find Mikasa holding out a crown for him. It was made of sunshine yellow dandelions.

"For me?" He pointed at himself.

Mikasa nodded, whispering a quiet "yes"

Techno forced himself to smile, "I don't know if I'd look all that good in a flower crown. They're far too pretty for someone like me."

"You're pretty," Mikasa protested.

Techno laughed, "You're sweet, kid."

Mikasa, seemingly tired of his games, grabbed the red cloth he covered his hair with-

"Wait no!"

-and pulled it down, shoving the flower crown on his head. Techno sighed, *Children.*

She gasped softly, "You're hair's pink."

Techno frowned, "Don't tell anyone."

"I won't," she promised, then "It's pretty."

Techno blinked, grabbing a lock of the hair between his fingers, "Yeah," he said, "I suppose it is."

—

The Maria Reclamation ruined everything.

Sobs filled the air. Old Man Arlert was saying his goodbyes.

Techno grimaced and tuned it out. He was already packing. All Wall Maria refugees above the age of sixteen and who were not in the military were required to go. Techno wasn't part of that demographic, but they would never know. The government was sending 250,000 people to die, not even giving them ODM gear or proper training. At least Techno could save a few of them.

This was why he hated the government. They tore families apart. Techno remembered a trail of tears on ice cold marble. Crowns thrown to the floor. Waking to find his brothers missing. Watching the country he built crumble, and not caring in the slightest. He built it out of love, and it died from it.

The shouts and sobs died down.

Hopefully, if Techno survived this, he could find Levi. He still hadn't figured anything out. All he'd learned was how to join the military. He didn't want to do that. He just wanted to find his friend.

Footsteps came from behind him.

"Got a minute?"

Techno turned to face Old Man Arlert, "Time's one of the few things I don't run out of."

The old man laughed, "That's where we're different. I'm quite short on it I'm afraid."

Techno gave a smile that didn't quite reach his eyes, "Who knows, maybe my timer will finally run out."

The old man sighed and sat down by him, "So you're thinking of going too then."

"I'm not 'thinking' of going," Techno said, "I sadly fit the parameters. I'm over sixteen, and I fled from Maria."

"Ah," the old man held up a finger, "but you're not from there, are you."

"How did you-"

"I'm not an idiot son."

Techno huffed, "Damn your family and their brains. Still, I look the part. I'm old enough and I live in the refugee camps. They'll try to get me in anyway."

"They're going by records, not just looks. I'm fairly sure you have none of those."

"You're asking me to stay." Techno realized.

The old man smiled, "I guess I am."

"Why?" Techno asked, "I could help. I could save people. I could save *you*. You could come home to Armin. Don't make him lose what little he has left."

"Technoblade look around," the old man made a gesture to the camp, "Look at this place. People are starving. That's why they're killing off one fifth of the population, so people can eat again. You've kept Armin, Eren and Mikasa fed, which is more than I could do, and I'm so grateful for it. When the refugees are sent out, it will take a couple months for food to become abundant again."

The old man gave him a haunted look, "Yesterday, I saw a child sucking the marrow from the femur of her brother. I will do whatever it takes to make sure that doesn't happen to those three."

"That's awfully selfish." Techno pointed out, "I could save so many more people than just three."

"Then let me be selfish, Techno. Grant a dead man his last wish."

Techno growled, "Don't start. I am not beholden to you in the slightest."

"I don't know what you are Techno," the old man said, "I don't know if you're human, a demon, or a god, but I do know one thing: you're kind. Please keep them safe."

He was crying now, tears pouring down a weathered old face.

"You're damning hundreds."

"I know," the old man cried, "I know."

"You're damning yourself."

"So be it."

"Damn you!" Techno shouted, "Damn you and your heart!"

Old man Arlert didn't respond, simply bowing his head. Techno grabbed him by the collar, and the old man flinched, bracing himself for the blow. Instead, Techno hoisted him to his feet and started walking away.

"Come on," he said gruffly.

"What?"

"Come on," Techno repeated, angrier this time, not pausing his walk.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

Techno shot him a look over his shoulder, "to get one last drink with a friend."

"Techno, the price of alcohol is far too high. Don't waste that on me."

Techno spun around, anger in his eyes, "I frankly, do not care. We are going to get a drink, and I am going to hate you. Got it?"

The old man almost broke down in another round of sobs, *"Thank you."*

"Don't say that." Techno snarled, "It makes me hate you more."

He laughed softly, "what shall we drink to?"

Techno thought about it for a second, "Stupidity." he decided.

—

Time passed quickly after that.

It was funny, how something so monumental could pass in a second.

All it took was a tattered old hat placed on a kid's head, and walking away. Techno had locked eyes with the old man, crimson burning with hate, the old man had smiled back.

And life kept on going.

Techno still fought, still kept the kids fed and safe. Armin still cries at night. Eren's anger grew. And Mikasa? She stood solid, but sad.

Armin reminded Techno of Wilbur. Weak physically, but with a mind sharper than netherite, a silver tongue when needed and more than that, a shining light of brilliance that Techno wanted to hide away and keep safe.

Eren was like Tommy. Crass, burning with anger. Both had bark much larger than bite, but both had undying perseverance and dreams so big that they might just become reality. Loud, yes, passionate, definitely, a hero, Techno wished they weren't. He hoped Eren wouldn't fall like heroes before him did.

Mikasa reminded him of himself. Strong, solid. Gifted in battle, bathed in blood. More than anything though, she was motivated by love. Techno knew that was closer to him than any of her other traits. Love was a double edged sword. It gave you strength, and broke you down when it gets torn away. Techno knew it all too well.

No one really questioned why Techno didn't get drafted. They just accepted it and kept living on. They couldn't do anything else.

And soon, after a year and a half of food shortages, there was enough to eat.

Techno bid goodbye to Blade, burning the mask as soon as he could. They made enough farming now.

They were able to get lodging in the basement of a kind old woman's home. It was barely big enough for the four of them, but it was a home.

Eventually, Techno was able to set down four bowls of steaming soup on the dinner table. And if he cried when he finally tasted the fruits of three years of suffering, that was no one's business but his own.

His stomach was full for the first time in a while.

He looked around the table at these kids he'd learned to care for.

His heart was full of love.

Damn you, Old Man.

You win.

—

"You met Captain Levi?!" Eren exclaimed.

"Yes?" Techno mumbled through a mouthful of soup.

"How are you so nonchalant about this?!" Eren yelled, "You met *Captain Levi.*"

Techno turned to Armin, "Is this supposed to be a big deal?"

Armin just shrugged.

Thanks, great help, Armin.

"Big deal," Eren said, "Big deal?"

"Here he goes," Mikasa rolled her eyes.

Eren either didn't hear her or didn't care, "You met humanity's strongest! They say he's as strong as an entire brigade of soldiers!"

"Stronger." Techno interected.

"My point exactly! And you met him!?"

"More than that," Techno said, "You could even call us friends."

Eren looked like he was about to explode.

Techno leaned over to Mikasa and Armin, whispering, "Is he okay?'

"He has a huge case of hero worship when it comes to Captain Levi." Armin whispered back.

Huh. Well, that could be useful.

From that day on, whenever Eren was being unruly Techno would say "Captain Levi wouldn't act like this" or "What would Captain Levi do if he saw you like this?" or "Captain Levi would be very disappointed."

Worked like a charm every. Single. Time.

Children and their hero crushes.

—

Techno missed Levi.

He just didn't know how to find him. Lord knows he tried.

One day, one day he would find him again. It had hit him a long time ago. Levi probably thought he was dead. He had probably mourned Techno. Hell, he didn't take Levi for the sentimental type, but Techno could even have a grave he didn't know about.

He needed to find Levi.

He'd hurt him.

He needed to make it right.

—

His hair had grown out through the years. He still kept it covered under his tattered old cloak, but it was getting longer.

He would have cut it by now but,

"Why do you like doing this?"

Mikasa threaded her fingers through his hair, skillfully weaving his hair into a waterfall braid.

"And why are you so good at it?" he grumbled.

It looked great, as much as Techno's pride hated to admit it.

Tommy used to do this with his hair, when he was young. It was sloppy, and lacked the beauty a man of his standing should have worn. He wore it like that anyway, to war meetings, balls, public events. He didn't care.

It was just one of those facts of life. Tommy braided his hair. Until, it wasn't, and Techno would have given anything to wear another messy braid his brother gave him.

"Carla, my adoptive mom used to do this for me. We would braid each other's hair."

Oh, right. Her mom was Eren's mom. She was gone.

"You miss her?"

Mikasa's fingers tightened in his hair, "How could I not?"

Techno smiled, "I get that. I lost my family too."

"They died?"

"No," Techno said, "But lost nonetheless."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. You three remind me of them a lot. I had two brothers. Tommy was bold and loud, always picking for a fight. He was brave too, and a little stupid, like Eren."

Mikasa giggled.

"Wilber was smart and sharp, like Armin. Could pick apart a person within a minute of meeting them, and would often bully them with whatever he found out. Thank god Armin isn't like that."

"And me?" she asked.

"You remind me of myself. You're a skilled fighter, dependable, and loyal to the bone. You also love with all your heart." Techno felt his heart sink, "Hold onto your family tight Mikasa. Don't lose them like I did."

"And pretty." Mikasa said.

"What?"

"You forgot to add pretty to the list."

Techno laughed, "Sure. And pretty."

—

"The requirement age for the military is only twelve?!"

Armin shot him an amused look, "yes?"

Gods, that was so young. Sure, Techno had seen younger, but it didn't make it any less bad.

"You only graduate out of training after three years." Eren piped in.

"So the real age is fifteen," Techno summarized.

"Pretty much." Armin shrugged.

"And you're all going."

They looked at each other, then said in perfect unison, "Yes."

Techno cringed, "Has anyone ever told you it's creepy when you do that?"

"You're coming too, aren't you?" Mikasa asked.

"Unfortunately." Techno grumbled, "I don't see why I have to go through training, though. I already know how to kill a titan."

"It's a requirement, Techno." Armin explained.

"Well they should learn to make exceptions. I don't want to train for three years. Jeez!"

"That's how long it takes to train people to kill titans Techno," Eren pointed out.

"Pish posh! It only took me an afternoon and some elbow grease."

All three looked at him like he was crazy.

"Sure," Armin said.

Oh yeah, they didn't know he came from outside the walls. He should probably tell them soon.

"I'm just saying! Shouldn't take that long to train a person into a Scout." he paused, "Wait, are you all going into the Scout regimine, or something else."

"Scouts," Eren said.

Reluctantly, Armin nodded along.

Techno frowned, "As your impromptu guardian, I would like to say this is an incredibly dumb idea."

"That's hypocritical." Eren pointed out.

"I am also very experienced at warfare, Eren. You, on the other hand, are eleven. Can you understand why I'm concerned? You might get killed."

"We know," Armin said quietly.

Techno sighed, "Brave or stupid. Such a thin line."

Eren scowled, "I don't care if I die!" he shouted, "If I can contribute even a little to the fight, I couldn't care less if I get killed. We need to be ready to die if we want to free humanity from the walls. If it costs my life, then I don't care. That's a price I'm willing to pay."

Techno went still. Silence settled over the room like fallen snow, icy and dangerous, sharp as a shard of glass. Immediately, Armin knew something was wrong. Techno was quiet, his eyes hidden under a lock of hair and his jaw clenched tight.

Suddenly, with sure, steady strides, Techno crossed the room and slapped Eren.

Mikasa leapt to her feet, dropping into a fighting stance. Armin grabbed her arm, shaking his head. She looked at him, betrayed, but didn't move.

Techno leaned down over Eren, "Now listen here. You can go join the scouts, you can fight for humanity, you can kill titans. I do not care. You can even die. But I will *never* allow you to value your life as little as that. You treat it like it's dirt, you selfish little brat."

Techno straightened himself back up, running a hand through his hair, "Have you ever wondered why I never went to reclaim Maria, Eren? It's because the old man begged me to stay, to keep you three safe and fed. He let himself die so you could live. Your life is not just not your own Eren. It belongs to him, and it belongs to everyone who loves you. Armin, Mikasa, they both would have to live on if you died. You would let that happen. You would throw that away.

If you hear nothing else I've said, hear this. You can join the scouts, you can fight, but never, *ever* throw your life away."

Eren stared at his feet in shame.

"Do you understand?" Techno snapped.

"Yes." Eren mumbled.

"Good," Techno walked out of the room, murmuring a quiet, *"Gods I need a drink."*

—

The crowd was thick today. You could hardly move with how packed the streets were. Mothers said goodbye to their kids, kissing them on the forehead and sending them off, knowing they wouldn't see them for the next three years. A good portion of them would drop out before that day came, what with how harsh the military training was.

Excitement and nervousness was buzzing through the crowd, people hopping from toe to toe as they waited in line.

"Age?" The man at the registration desk asked.

"Twenty-seven."

The man raised an eyebrow, but scribbled it down.

"Birthday?"

"January 27th 840."

Scribble.

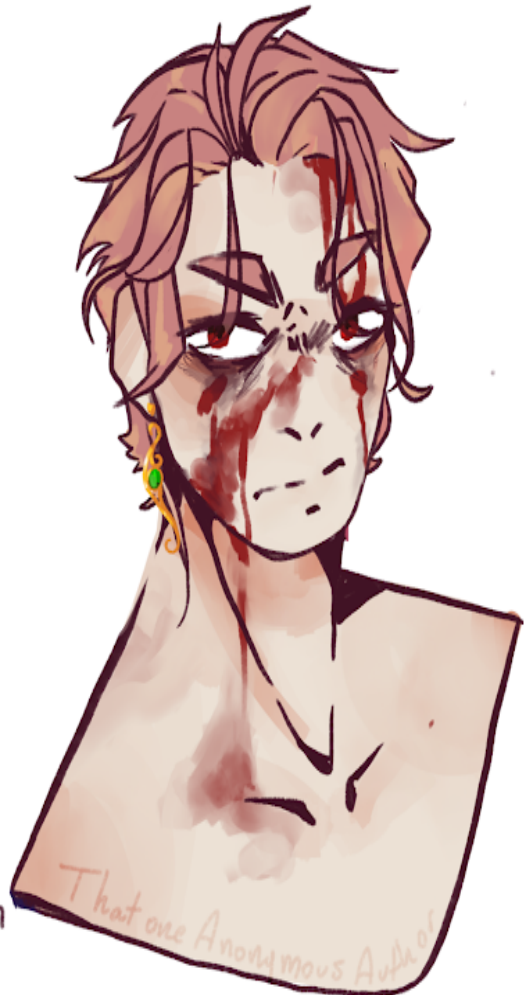"Location of birth?"

"Trost, Wall Rose."

Scribble.

"Name?"

He grinned.

"Technoblade."

Techno at end of chapter

Techno at beginning of chapter

That one Anonymous Author

Chapter End Notes

"Technoblade? That's a dumb name."

"Shut up."

Wassup bitches, bros, and all nonbinary hoes (or whatever you identify as)

Right so.

This took forever.

Fun fact: A deleted scene was gonna be where some ppl try to mug Techno and he absolutely DESTROYS them. They're on the ground, with broken noses or whatever begging for their lives like

"What do you want?! Oh Godess what do you want from us?!"

and Techno, chest heaving and angry is just like

"All I want is some Gods. Damn. SOUP!"

Couldn't find where to put it in. Also I miss innocent Mikasa from ep 1 so I tried to make her a bit softer than just cold. She's still gonna be a badass tho, she just knows how to braid hair and make flower crowns. Bet you wish you could do all that.

Anyways, some clarifying points.

What Techno considers to be an "innocent" is someone he did not actively want to kill. If he meets some random guy, decides he's an asshole, and decides to kill him, he has not killed an innocent. If he wages war and blows up a town, they are not "innocents" Techno is still a war loving ass, he just does not like killing without his control. He doesn't like killing people who had no quarrel with. He doesn't like causing or craving pain. When he does kill of his own violation, he makes it quick.

Also song for this chapter, hmmmmmm probably Numb Little Bug.

Might upload some art for this chapter sometime in the future. IDK

Anyways, comment. Makes me happy.

Oh yeah, tell me your theories for this fic :)

JESUS FUCKING CHRIST! JUST REALIZED THIS IS ANOTHER 12K CHAPTER! FUCK! I SAID I WOULD MAKE IT SHORTER! at least this one is more cracky. Sigh, effort is annoying. Don't expect more chapters this long. I'll try to aim for 8K or something (This chapter WAS supposed to be 8K) fuck.

Edit: I just want everyone to know about the literal shit-storm I went through to get that image in here. Fucking hell.

A Carving, Coat, and Constellation

Chapter Summary

Training arc and stuff. Fucking long ass chapter >:(

Chapter Notes

FUCK I SPENT SO MUCH TIME ON THIS AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA-enjoy.

The sky was an oil spill, infinitely dark, ecompasing, and shimmering with an inviting glint. Stars were scattered like diamonds across rich satin, glinting silver and pale gold. The moon hung softly in its midnight bed. Her pale face was soft and soothing compared to the harsh brightness of the sun. She lay inviting in the sky, so sweet and kind. Her stars seemed to glow brighter when around her.

"These aren't my stars," Techno said.

Levi glanced over at him, "What do you mean?"

Techno made a frustrated noise, "They're just not the same as where I'm from. The stars shift and the constellations change, but I've never seen these patterns, not in my entire life."

"Constellations?" Levi found himself asking.

"You know, constellations, like the big dipper and stuff," Techno paused suddenly, turning to Levi with an aghast expression on his face, "Wait, do you not know what a constellation is?"

"No?"

"This is unacceptable. Simply unacceptable." Techno declared, "Constellations are patterns the stars form in the sky. Like images and stuff. People use them to tell stories."

"I've never heard of them before," Levi admitted. To be fair though, they probably existed, it's just well, Levi had never even seen the sky until he was fifteen. He barely knew stars existed outside of stories. To him, constellations just didn't exist.

"Seriously?" Techno asked, "You guys have been around for thousands of years and have never even named the stars? Talk about lack of creativity."

"Oi, don't blame me for this. It's not like it's my job to make constellations or whatever."

"That's exactly what your job is!" Techno exclaimed, "If one person never names them then they'll never get named. There has to be a first."

"You can't just name a star." It was wrong. You couldn't just change the sun's name to Todd or whatever. It just came with the name, y'know? It felt weird to try to name something as grand as that.

"Sure you can," Techno reasoned, "Look I'll do it right now."

He pointed up to the sky, where a thicker patch of stars lay. They started at a centerpoint and feathered out from each side in shaky lines, like a flower, or a fan. It was one of the clearer patterns in the sky that night.

"Peregrine," Techno said, "that's it name."

Levi tilted his head, "It doesn't even look anything like a bird."

"Lack of imagination," Techno sing-songed.

"Lack of delusion more like."

Techno rolled his eyes, "A constellation doesn't have to look super close to what it is. What matters is the story behind it. A constellation, above all else, is a tale people tell. The stars just help get the point across."

Levi raised a brow, "Uh-huh. Sure. What's the story behind this one then?"

"Simple. I met a man in a forest, and he could fly like he had wings. His name was Peregrine."

"That's a very botched summary."

"You're such a nitpick," Techno complained, "I've done this a lot more than you, you know. You should trust my opinion."

"If you've done this so much, then why are you so terrible at it?"

"Alright, wise guy! If you're so good at it, why don't you give it a try."

Levi huffed, "Fine."

He pointed up at a long strip of stars with four lines coming from the bottom. It looked like a charging boar, fighting off the rest of the night sky. Behind it lay Peregrine. It was almost like they had each other's back.

"Tech. That's what I'm calling it," Levi decided.

Techno chuckled, "I'm glad you think so highly of me. It's not everyday I get a constellation named after me. What's the story?"

Levi hummed, "I met a man in a forest, and he fought with the strength of a beast. He called himself Techno."

"Why'd you pick that cluster?" Techno asked.

"It just looks like you," Levi said.

"What?! It looks nothing like me!"

"Yes it does," Levi argued, "If you turn your head just so and squint your eyes it looks just like . . ."

Techno blinked, "Just like?" he prompted.

"An idiot."

Techno's laughter filled the night just as much as the stars or the moon. Maybe more, for it was so much sweeter, so much kinder, so much more valuable than the silver moon or her diamond stars.

Levi thought he could live like this forever.

Just he, his friend, and the stars.

Levi shot up with a gasp.

His heart was pounding out of his chest and a cold sweat trickled down his back.

Damn it.

The dreams had been plaguing him ever since the fall of Wall Maria. Ever since Techno, well- He didn't like thinking about it. Most nights it wasn't even nightmares that he had to deal with. It was a memory. Kind ones, gentle ones, treasured ones. He tried his damndest to keep them out of his mind when awake, but once sleep took over they came out in full force. It was terrible, the way they reminded him of the best of Techno, made him remember him, then tore him away as he awoke.

Levi tumbled out of bed. His blankets were too warm, too stifling, too suffocating. The weather had grown warmer with the end of spring and start of summer. The air was gentle and comforting, perfectly warm. He hated it. He would have given anything to trade it for the bitter sting of winter air. He would have given anything to be huddled away in a tree nook again, frost on his fingers, his breath in the air, his friend sitting beside him. Still alive.

Levi shook his head. Don't start thinking about him.

It had been two years. It was time to move on.

He should have a long time ago.

Levi pushed open his shutters, hoping to get some cooler air in his room. He wasn't going to sleep again tonight, but at the very least he could be comfortable.

The window gave way to the dark night. The Scout's headquarters was far from any city. Partially because their horses took up a lot of grazing space, partially because they had a few real titans chained up in containment, partially because their posts in town tended to get vandalized. People just didn't like them. Whatever the cause, they were stationed in an open field, no towns for kilometers.

Without the light pollution from the cities, the sky was as clear as it had been outside the walls. It was all silken satin and silver.

It didn't take Levi to pick out their constellations from the mix. Peregrine stood proud and tall, its wings fanned out, ready to leap into flight. Tech still was tensed and angry, still charging the rest of the stars, still trying to protect Peregrine. Silly stars, why couldn't it let Peregrine protect it too?

Levi squeezed his eyes shut. It wouldn't do good to think of Techno now.

It was easier to forget; less painful that way.

Sometimes, when he was having a bad day, and he couldn't seem to rid Techno from his mind, he would pretend that Techno was crazy. You couldn't be fond or miss stories told over flickering campfire, not when those stories were all concocted in the mind of an insane man. He couldn't mourn the ocean that Techno had told him he'd see, not when it probably didn't exist. He couldn't mourn a friend when in reality, all they were was a fucked up nutjob.

But Techno wasn't. He didn't just make up everything. He was telling the truth. Levi knew that, deep down, and he couldn't pretend otherwise. Techno was right, his imagination was lacking.

So, no matter how hard he tried to pretend or forget, Levi couldn't.

Every Single time he closed his eyes, he saw Techno walking away, his blood trailing behind him. Levi didn't know where he was going, just that it was far away, and he couldn't follow.

Wait! Levi would shout. *Don't go!*

Wait.

But Techno would never pause his walk, never stop to send one last glance back at Levi. He would just be gone.

Gone and dead.

Levi opened his eyes, finding the stars were still there, waiting for him to return.

Peregrine looked duller these days, not having quite the same sparkle it once did. Tech, on the other hand, seemed to glow even brighter than before. Like its simple significance made it stand out against the sky.

Levi thinks he finally understands what Techno was trying to tell him. Constellations aren't about the stars themselves. It's about the stories, the tales they tell, the memories they keep. How they keep an idea, a myth, a person alive, even as the years pass and pass by. The constellations will always be there, still telling their stories, still whispering a tale against a satin sky.

Techno would always be in the sky, his collection of stars screaming 'I am still here'.

"I think I got the story wrong, Techno," Levi said to the empty night. His heart struck a sad chord, a melancholy tune ringing out inside him. He hadn't had the courage to talk to Techno in all the years since his death. It was stupid, to talk to someone who was long gone, they couldn't hear him, and they never would, but Levi tried anyway. "I met a man in a forest and he fought with the strength of the stars. He called himself Techno." Levi took a deep breath, "I just called him my friend."

Levi hoped that wherever Techno was now, whether it be the kingdom of heaven, or the night sky, that he was happy. That he was at peace. That one of them could finally stop fighting.

—

"Hey kid!"

Keith Shadis was an intimidating man. His stature alone was frightening, standing at six and a half feet, he easily towered over the fresh recruits. His voice was another thing, rough and loud, it was enough to make the recruits shit their pants when he screamed at them, which he seemed to be doing a lot of right now.

Techno couldn't be bothered to care. He'd gone through his fair share of military hazing. This was a Tuesday for him.

But not everyone had that kind of attitude. Especially not a certain blond haired boy.

Armin jumped, almost shaking in fright, "Yes Sir!"

Shadis walked over to Armin, glowering. He looked like he was about to punt Armin out a window, despite the fact they were standing in an open field. Somehow, Techno knew that Shadis would find a way to do it anyway.

"Who the hell are you?!" Shadis questioned the boy.

"I'm A-Armin Arlert from Shiganshina, Sir!" Armin stammered out.

Shadis cocked his head, "That so? That's a name fit for a dumbass if I ever heard one! Your parents name you that?"

"No sir!" Armin said, "It was my grandfather."

"Arlert, why are you here?!" Shadis shouted. And geez, the shouting. It really did not end.

Techno sent a sympathetic glance over at Armin. The boy looked downright terrified, but he was standing his ground. Techno was so proud.

"To contribute to humanity's victory, Sir!"

"How very admirable," Shadis yelled, "you'll make first-grade titan feed!"

Oh yeah, Levi mentioned something about a 'shadis' as a former commander of the Scouts. Wonder if it's the same guy. Techno had always assumed he died. It tended to be a running theme for the scouts.

Seemingly done screaming at Armin, Shadis moved onto the other recruits, and Techno promptly stopped listening.

He did, however, note that Shadis seemed to be skipping recruits. Some people he didn't recognise and Eren and Mikasa. Shadis just glanced at them and moved on. Guess he didn't think they needed hazing.

Shadis got to a brown haired guy with an undercut.

That one ended with Shadis headbutting the guy - Jake? John? Jaboomba? Jean? Yeah, Jean - and screaming at him about something called the "Military Police" whatever that was.

Now Shadis was torturing some poor kid for saluting wrong. Techno needed to actually pay attention now. He had no idea how to do their version of a salute. Every army had a different one, and he didn't know theirs. He didn't want to be the next Kanye Spidger.

It's Connie Springer, ya dolt

Technodumb

Pay attention idiot

E

Y'all this is boring I'm turning off the stream

Wait no it might get interesting

/rainbowchat

WHY DO PEOPLE STILL DO /RAINBOWCHAT

Oh, you're new here

I've been a subscriber for two years????

Not enough time. It takes longer to get used to this chat's bullshit

See? This is why Techno gets distracted. Not only was this incredibly boring, but he had to listen to chat 24/7 365.

Shadis suddenly paused, turning wide eyed and aghast towards something. Techno followed his gaze.

There was a girl with ruddy brown hair and light brown eyes. Her face was flecked with light freckles that traveled like stars across her cheeks and nose. Oh, and she was eating a potato, *loudly.*

Shadis dropped Connie and started walking towards her.

"You," he said, "What the fuck are you doing?"

She looked at the people around her, thinking he was talking to one of them, then took another bite of her potato.

It was official, Techno liked this girl.

Shadis stepped up to the girl, positively infuriated, "You! I'm talking to you! Who the fuck are you!"

She quickly swallowed her bite of potato and snapped into a salute, which Techno noted for later.

"Sasha Braus from Daupa, south of Wall Rose!" she shouted, eyes fixed steadily forward.

"Sasha Braus," Shadis repeated, "Just what is it you are holding in your right hand?"

"It is a steamed potato, Sir!" Sasha responded, "I found one lying in the kitchen!"

Yeah, Techno really liked her.

"So you stole it?" Shadish asked in a grave tone, "Why? Why are you eating a potato right now?"

"It's best when eaten warm, so I thought that eating it now would be the best course of action, sir."

"No," Shadis said, "Why are you eating a potato at all?"

Sasha furrowed her brow, "Are you asking why people eat potatoes in general, sir?"

The rest of the recruits tensed up. Oh, she was going to have her ass handed to her. Techno was personally having the time of his life.

Shadis went stock still, like a snake that was in a strike pose, all coiled up and ready to spring.

Slowly, Sasha broke her potato in two, holding the smaller half out to Shadis, "Take half if you'd like, sir."

Ignoring the fact that it wasn't even close to a half, wow, what a sacrifice. Sasha was truly a saint. Techno could never give up as much as that. No, seriously, he couldn't. Not unless you paid him. What? You've got to hustle to be a top potato farmer.

Shadis picked up the potato, "Half?"

Sasha gave a wobbly smile. For a moment it looked like that would be the end of it, then,

"YOU CALL THIS HALF YOU LOUSY SON OF A BITCH!?" Shadis exclaimed. Wow, he took his potatoes seriously, "The only thing half about this is how many brain cells you have! Did your mother drop you on the head as a child? Did your father give you a concussion trying to beat some sense into that empty thing of a head?! Why, this should be considered cannibalism, given the fact that you show the same amount of brain power as this potato you're so fond of!"

Sasha's smile fell.

Shadis pointed to the empty field, "Now you better start running until your legs fall off or I will make you wish you were never born."

She turned to run, but hesitated.

"And you will be having none of the meal tonight, as you've already taken more than your fair share," Shadis finished.

Techno doesn't think he's ever seen someone as heartbroken as Sasha was right now.

With Sasha running away, Shadis turned his attention back to the rest of the recruits. He looked down at the potato in his hand for a moment, then clicked his tongue before throwing it onto the ground. Techno couldn't help the whine that found it's way out of his throat.

"What a waste," he muttered.

Wrong move. It turned out Shadis had super hearing or something. The man immediately whipped his head around and started marching towards Techno.

"What was that you no good lout?" He spat.

"Nothing sir." Techno said back, lacking the enthusiasm the other recruits were showing. He'd done this a million times, it was the same thing over and over, he was allowed to be bored.

"Who the fuck are you soldier?!"

"Technoblade from Trost, Wall Rose, sir."

"Technoblade. What kind of black-out drunk was your mother when she named you that!?"

"I do not know, sir," Techno responded, "I would imagine very."

"How old are you, maggot?" Shadis asked, "requirement age is twelve, not fifty."

Techno pulled out his fingers and started counting under his breath, before he noticed he was getting stares and quickly put them away, "Twelve thousa- I mean twenty seven, sir."

"That's old enough to have a kid of your own. The fuck are you doing joining the army!?"

"I only wish to aid humanity in their fight against the titans sir."

"Sure, of course," he didn't sound very convinced, "come on, tell me the real reason. Nobody just wants to 'aid humanity'. What is it, do you actually want to join the MPs and live in the interior? Do you want to die? Do you have nowhere else to go because no one would hire your sorry ass?"

Techno scowled, "I want to find my friend."

"Is he in the military?"

"Yes, sir."

"Let me guess," Shadis said, "Scouts?"

Techno hesitated for a moment, "That is correct, sir."

"Congratulations!" Shadis applauded him, "Your friend is dead, or will be soon-"

Techno snapped his eyes over to look at Shadis, crimson filled with cold rage. For a moment Shadis thought he saw a curl of black flicker around the edge of the eye, but he couldn't be sure. Still, the message Techno was sending was clear: *I dare you to finish that sentence.*

Let it never be said that Shadis wasn't a smart man. He knew what battles to fight, you had to as a Scout commander. Retreats were necessary if you wanted *anyone* to get home. His years in scouts had honed in fine instincts that had saved his life more times than he could nout. Right now, those same instincts that had kept him alive in the field were screaming at him to run.

So Shadis took a step back, scowled, and continued on his way.

—

"Wow, potato girl's still running, huh," Eren remarked, "When Shadis told her to run until she dropped I was not expecting her to last this long."

They were standing on the porch of one of the dorms. It was Techno, the trouble trio - oh, sorry, he meant Eren, Armin, and Mikasa - and a few other recruits. The sun was setting by now, casting the entire camp in a golden glow. From their porch they could see the training field, where a girl was still hobbling across the open area.

Connie shrugged, "She's got dedication, I'll give her that."

"But five hours?"

"Like I said, dedication."

"I thought she would have given up so much quicker. She looked terrified when Shais told her to get running."

Connie shrugged, "That was nothing compared to when he told her she wouldn't be getting any food tonight."

"Hey," Techno chimed in, "Some people are food motivated. Shadis just knows how to get under people's skin."

Connie grinned, "Speaking of Shadis, you totally scared him shitless!"

Techno blinked, "I wouldn't say that."

"He did seem pretty frightened," Eren said.

"He wasn't *frightened,* " Techno stressed, "He was just smart."

"Didn't want to pick a fight he couldn't win?" Eren suggested, a sly smile on his face.

"Don't talk like your superiors like that, Eren," Techno chastised, "It'll come back to bite you in the future."

"I'm going to agree with Techno on this one, Eren." Armin said.

"Same," Mikasa agreed from her place at the back of the porch. Connie startled, not knowing she was there. He would learn eventually. Mikasa was *always* there, whether or not she talked was a

coin toss though.

Eren groaned, "You guys are so lame."

"Smart, more like." Armin shot back.

"Maybe Shadis could teach you the importance of using your brain for once," Techno mused, "You can't just solve every problem by yelling at it, unfortunately."

"I hate each and every one of you."

"Feeling is mutual." Techno smiled.

"Are you guys like family or something?" Connie asked.

Armin and Mikasa said, "Yes." just as Eren and Techno had some grumbled form of "No" and "Not technically. . . or by choice."

"I'm getting mixed signals," Connie admitted.

Techno shrugged, "Get used to it."

"So you're their dad then?"

Techno laughed, like actually full on bellyaching, floor-rattling, booming *laughed,* "Gods no."

"Older brother then?"

"Nope."

"How are you related then?"

Techno scowled, "got guilt tripped, now I'm saddled with them."

Armin rolled his eyes, Eren laughed, Mikasa frowned. Techno only noticed the last one. Correction: Techno only *cared* about the last one.

"Not you Mikasa, you're a delight." He amended.

She stopped frowning.

"See!" Eren exclaimed, "I knew you liked Mikasa more!"

"Yeah," Techno said, "That's because she doesn't stay up until one in the morning ranting about titans. Some of us like to sleep, Eren."

Connie laughed, "I like you guys." He stuck his hand out, "The name's Connie Springer!"

Techno shook it, "Technoblade. No last name, well I guess you could say Craft- actually no, don't." he nodded back at the trio behind him, "The loud one's Eren Jaeger. Say hi Eren."

"Fuck you, Techno."

"Likewise." Techno continued without a hitch, "The one with the constant scowl and the 'I could kill you with my pinky' look about her is Mikasa Ackerman," Mikasa waved, "and the blond is Armin."

"'The blond' is a bit reductive," Armin protested quietly.

Techno rolled his eyes, "Fine. The blond with a brain bigger than Eren's ego is Armin Arlert."

He finished his introductions just in time to hear a loud *thud.* Techno looked over the training yard, finding Sasha collapsed onto the ground, face pressed into the dirt, a steady line of drool trailing from her mouth.

"Oh shoot!" Connie exclaimed, "Potato girl's down!" he cupped his hands around his mouth, screaming, "You did good, potato girl!"

After a second, a wobbly arm rose from Sasha's limp body, a weak thumb's up hovering over her head.

—

Dinner was a noisy affair.

The recruits had a buzz of excitement to them that apparently, even Shadis could not quell. There was shouting, laughter, taunts and teases. There was a jovial air to the whole thing. People were getting acquainted with the people who they would spend the next three years with. Finding their friends, deciding their enemies. It was a whole ordeal. Most importantly though, was the *drama.*

"Wait! You two were at the fall of Shiganshina?!" Connie shouted.

Hesitantly, Armin and Eren noded.

"Did you see the colossal titan then?" he asked.

Before either could answer people around the table began to chime in.

"I want to know about that too!"

"I heard it was a hundred meters tall!"

"Did you also see the armored titan?"

"I was told that the colossal stepped right over the wall!"

"It didn't," Eren said slowly, "It was only able to peek over the walls."

"Then you were able to see real titans right?" Connie questioned, "Were they as terrifying as they say?"

This was when Eren's ego decided to rear its ugly head. He leaned back, smirk on his face and began talking out of his ass, "Nah. Titan's aren't really that big of a deal. Once we master the Omni-Directional-Movement gear they'll be no match for us! We finally have the chance to become soldiers. I'm going to join the survey corps and purge the world of titans."

Techno rolled his eyes. He could see Armin doing the same.

"Hey, are you nuts?" a voice interrupted. Techno turned his head to see it was that same undercut guy from before. What was his name? Jack? Jen? Jaquis? Whatever his name was, he continued, "Did you seriously just say you want to join the survey corps?"

Eren frowned, "Damn strait. And you're planning on joining the Military Police and taking it easy, right?"

Jeremy smiled lazily, "I'm just an honest guy. I think that's preferable to pretending to be brave when you're actually scared shitless."

"You got something to say?" Eren stood up and walked over to him.

Jock stood as well, "I might."

They were chest to chest now. Teenagers and their tempers. Techno would have stepped in to stop them by now, but if he was being honest he didn't particularly care to regulate their juvenile drama. Oh, he'd love to knock Eren down a few pegs, tell the rest of the recruits about the horrors of titans. Tell them about the broken blades he'd found in the forest, the skeletons, the people he'd seen die, the one's he failed to save, but he wasn't that man to them. Techno didn't come from outside the walls. Techno didn't come from another world. Techno was born and raised in Trost and had never seen a titan before. Techno wasn't who he really was.

So he didn't tell them.

He couldn't.

Luckily, he didn't have to. While the two boys were at each other's throats, throwing a hissy fit, Mikasa strode right past them, probably heading off to the bunks. As she did so, Techno saw Jim's eye's pop right out of his skull. His face smoothed out from a scowl into a gentle look of surprise, a gentle blush high on his cheeks.

Jack - Techno really needed to learn his name - reached out and grabbed Mikasa by the arm.

She turned around, face as blank as ever, "What?"

Juniper-berry blushed harder, "uh, I haven't seen you around before," he began to trail off, mumbling, "Y-Your hair is really pretty."

Mikasa didn't even twitch, "I see." Then she walked out of the room.

Techno could have laughed, but that would have been rude. Teens were allowed to have their crushes and whatnot. He shouldn't judge. Even if it's stupid. Even if it's really funny. He shouldn't laugh.

He did.

—

Techno toed carefully around the limb body. Sasha had quite literally ran till she stopped. If Techno didn't know better, he would think her dead. The soft rise and fall of her chest was the only thing cluing him into the fact that she was still alive.

He bent down and tapped her shoulder. No response.

He did it again, giving him similar results.

Techno sighed, pulling half of a baked potato from his pocket. The effect was instantaneous. Sasha jumped up, a feral gleam in her eye. She moved like a beast, teeth flashing as she lunged for the potato. Techno was only barely able to pull it out of the way before Sasha took the potato - as well as his fingers - in one sharp bite.

When Sasha came away, biting nothing but air, she turned back to him in surprise. A low growl rumbled in her throat. She startled circling around him in all fours, body tensed and ready to strike. Spit flew from her mouth as she snapped and growled at him.

Techno raised a brow, "Do you want the potato or to kill me? I'm getting mixed signals."

That seemed to snap her out of it. The growl choked off abruptly and Sasha sat up, all fight leaving her form, "Wait, you're just going to give it to me?"

"That was the plan," Techno said, "but I'd like to keep my fingers doing it."

He held out the potato to her. After a moment's hesitation, she snatched it away and scarfed it down.

Cautiously, she looked at him, "Why?"

Techno shrugged, "I like potatoes too. It's rare you find someone with the same passion as you."

Sasha crossed her arms, "Favorite type of potato?"

"Yukon Gold for taste, Russet for size," Techno responded without a second of hesitation.

Sasha's eyes widened, "You *are* a potato connoisseur."

Techno grinned, he was right. Sasha would be perfect for what he had in mind. "Have you ever grown a potato?"

"No," Sasha replied, tilting her head, "Back home we mostly hunted and grew vegetables, but we never did potatoes."

"That's a shame, a single potato plant can yield up to ten potatoes. They're an ideal source of food." Techno pulled another potato from his pocket, whole and uncooked this time, "would you be willing to try?"

Sasha swallowed thickly, "Where did you get that?"

"Stole it," Techno held a finger to his lips, "I trust you won't tell."

Sasha frantically nodded her head.

"Good," Techno emptied all of his pockets, sending a cascade of potatoes tumbling out onto the ground, "Because I stole a lot."

—

The day began as most days in the military do, loud and abruptly.

A horn sounded, cutting through the quiet of the bunkhouse easily. It startled the dreamers from sleep and sent them tumbling out of their beds. Some are lethargic and slow in their movement, grumbling under their breath. Some are panicked and hurried as they threw their uniforms on hastily.

Techno arorse with the same ruthless efficiency he fights with. The clear sound of trumpet gently severed him from a half-finished dream. Something about flowers, he couldn't really remember. He does not lie in bed and try to. His bed is quickly made, his uniform fashioned crisp and clean on his body and the knife under his pillow tucked into his boot.

There is a sort of melancholy to mornings. The way the sky is so pale and white, filling the bunkhouse with a gentle sort of light. The men asleep there just barely touched by the sun's rising light. It is a kind of grief, almost. A funeral for the night that has passed.

More light gradually seeps into the room, the windows breaking it into glowing shards cast onto the floor, like delicate frosted lilies. They're beautiful in the way a skeleton is beautiful, macabre and sweet when lowered into the casket. Techno could see morning dew gathered on the windowsill, like tears crying for the death of the night. Perhaps that was why it's called a mourning.

Techno sucked in a breath, held it, and let it go.

Mornings are both incredibly important and rather insignificant to him. On one hand he's lived too many mornings to count, seen the sun rise and fall millions of times, felt the sadness of the moon's leave over and over. On the other hand, every morning is another new day he never thought he would see. Thousands of years of life and he was still standing, somehow, despite it all, alive. He felt both revelation and resignation each time the morning came.

"I don' wanna get up…" Someone groaned into their pillow. Techno turned to find a sleeping Eren, curled up in his bed, hands twisted into his sheets and face buried deep into his pillow. Armin was standing over him, shaking him gently, saying "Eren come on, you need to get out of bed." It did not work.

Armin looked up from Eren's body, sending Techno a helpless look.

He pinched the bridge of his nose. He was too tired for this.

Techno crossed the floor over to Eren's bunk, shoving the boneless body in bed, "Come on, brat. Get up."

"*Nuh'*" Came the reply.

He sighed, heavy and tired. Why him?

He glared down at Eren, "Fine you asked for this."

Without another word, he grabbed Eren, lifted him up, and flipped him out of bed. He landed with a loud *thud* and a scream.

Eren popped out of the covers, face twisted into a scowl, "Techno what the hell?!"

Techno dusted his hands off, put on a lazy smile, and walked away, "Rise and shine, princess." he waved over his shoulder.

—

They do not start out with working with the ODM gear as Techno thought. They start with running. A lot of running. Laps and laps around the courtyard, so many times you start to lose count. Twenty melds into forty and fourty flies by to a hundred. Soon, you have no idea how many times you've run in the same circle.

Techno began his next lap, passing the starting line for what felt like the millionth time.

Despite the rather. . . *arduous* nature of the exercise, Techno did not mind the running. It was like second nature for him, and he slipped easily into the grueling activity. He knew what the purpose of the exercise was. The trainees were not heavily muscled, and it took a good deal of strength to properly operate ODM gear. Techno was already in fighting form, and as such the running didn't take much of a physical toll.

He cast a glance behind him. The sentiment, it seemed, was not shared by the rest of the trainees. They staggered along, sweat running rivers across their skin and breaths coming out in uneven puffs. Even Mikasa looked like she was struggling. Talent could only take you so far after all. Armin in particular seemed to not be doing well. He looked like he might fall right over any second.

Despite not feeling the physical effects of the exercise, Techno didn't exactly enjoy it either. Its repetition drove him to the edge of madness. It was like watching a pendulum swing back and forth. So incredibly boring, feeling every second tick by as you waited for it to finally *stop*. This must have been how Levi felt when Techno made him run. For the first time in two years, Techno was actually sorry about that.

Techno cast another glance back to check on Armin. The kid was really struggling now, trailing so behind the pack he had been laped several times.

Slowly, Techno reeled in his breakneck pace, shifting from his fast paced sprint into a slow jog. Soon he fell back into the pack and fell out of it until he was trotting slowly alongside Armin.

"You doing alright, kid?" He asked.

Armin continued to run as fast as he could - which wasn't very fast - each movement of his limbs a struggle against gravity. "I'm f-" he panted, "-fine."

Techno raised a brow, "You sure?"

Armin nodded.

Techno kept his eyes planted firmly ahead, "Kid you can drop out if you can't handle this."

" *I'm fine."* Armin grit out.

"I don't think you ar-"

Armin shut his eyes tightly and pressed onward with a scowl. It wasn't much, but he was climbing steadily ahead of Techno, moving with the vigor and grit he was lacking before. Not before long he was joining back up with the pack.

Techno watched him run away and grinned proudly, "atta boy."

—

"Wait! You cut your hair, Mikasa?!"

"Yes."

"..... *why?!*"

"Eren said it would get caught in the ODM gear."

"Mikasa, we both know Eren is full of shit."

"He's not-"

"He is. Everyone knows it. . . . . SHUT UP CHAT! I'M AN ADULT LET ME SWEAR!"

—

Techno shouldered his way through the thick brush, Sasha following behind him. He pushed a large swath of ivy aside, walking under the draping leaves. The forest really was dense. It reminded him of where he had lived before coming to the walls, well, minus the man eating monsters. It was full of the same dense vegetation that seemed to carpet the floor and cling to every solid surface. No one would want to come here. That's what made it the perfect spot.

"It's somewhere around here," he muttered, wading through a deep patch of ferns.

"Are you sure?" Sasha asked. Her foot caught on a tree root, sending her stumbling forward. She cast a glance up at him, "It uh, just doesn't seem like a particularly good spot for growin' much of anythin'."

"That's why no one will ever check here." A rave flew overhead, sending an loud croak echoing throughout the woods. "Plus," Techno said, "There's plenty of wildlife to hunt."

Sasha hummed, "Fair point."

He pushed a curtain of branches to the side. Bright light flooded through the opened pathway and cut through the shadowed undestroy of the forest. The dark blues and blacks bled into warm emerald greens and yellows under the intense sunlight, "Ah, here we are."

Techno stepped through the threshold. The thick woods slowly began to thin out in front of them, opening up into a small meadow. It was brightly lit and simply glowed with warmth. A small creek ran in a jagged line through the clearing. The water made lovely little gurgling sounds and shimmered in the midday sun.

Wilbur would have loved it here. The thought came unbidden and completely undesired. A sharp pang of sorrow shot through his chest. Techno needed to stop thinking about them. Phil, Wilbur, Tommy, they were all gone. They were a world away. Techno had no idea what had become of them. Besides, Wilbur wouldn't want Techno thinking of him anyway. They weren't brother's anymore. Tommy and Wilbur had made that abundantly clear the last time he'd seen them, when Wilbur had been lost to insanity and Tommy had been lost to heroism.

Perhaps it was only Techno's fault for thinking that they were family in the first place. All those years ago he let himself love, and he never stopped regretting it.

There was a boy, small and sad, sitting at the foot of his father's throne. He didn't have the sunshine yellow hair or blue eyes that the rest of his family had. Instead, he wore the dusty brown curls of his mother and held her same softness. He wasn't strong like his father nor was he bold as his brother. He was alone, silver in a house of gold.

The soldier-king hardly saw him around the palace at all these days. Though, he supposed he was never really looking. The boy could be skipped over so easily when surrounded by the rest of his family's shine. The soldier-king didn't know what that was like, to go unnoticed. He did know however, what it was like to be alone.

"Boy, shouldn't you be with your father?"

The boy regarded him with a cool glance, "He's out training with Tommy."

"There are more than enough swords for two princes," the soldier-king responded.

"But is there a place for two of them?" the boy retorted.

The soldier king frowned, "Your father loves you."

"Please," the boy scoffed, "He doesn't love. We all know that when mom died something in him broke."

"To be broken is not to be without love," he sat down beside the boy, "I know that all too well. The ones who are broken are often the ones who love too much."

The boy looked away, quiet for a moment, "He sees her in me."

He hummed, "That is not a bad thing."

"It is," he said, "I remind him of what he's lost. There are days he can't stand to look at me."

"He is grieving. We all are. Soon he'll come back to you."

"And if he doesn't? What if he never comes around, Techno?" A tear dropped from the boy's chin.

Techno pulled the boy into his chest, cradling him gently, letting him cry into the folds of his cloak, "then I will come. Say the word, and I'll be there. No matter what, I'm still your brother, Wilbur."

Techno shook his head. There was no time to be reminiscing over the past. What was gone was gone. He couldn't change that.

He strode out into the clearing, spinning around to get a full view of it, "It's not too big, but it has enough space for our little project. Of course we'll have to get rid of the grass and rocks, but after that we'll have a nice plot of land to work with."

Sasha glanced around the field, "We've got thirteen seed potatoes. Assumin' we split 'em into thirds and each plant has an average yield of ten potatoes thats . . ." she quickly counted on her fingers, then gasped, "an ideal yield of about 390 potatoes!"

Techno nodded, "If we're lucky at least. That'll be 195 potatoes each. Did you bring the hoes?"

Sasha pulled two sturdy spades from the pack she brought with her. They would be ideal for cutting through the grassy turf.

She tossed one to Techno who caught it easily, spinning it around in his hand in a quick sword flourish.

Sasha snorted, "Show off."

"I live to entertain," he quipped back.

"No," she said, "you live to help me till this field."

"And you live to eat."

She laughed, "You're right about that."

Techno raised his spade and smirked, "Race you to the end?."

Sasha matched his grin, "You're on, potato-man."

—

If there was one thing from the military that Techno did not miss, it was the smell. He really wondered who thought it would be a good idea to put hundreds of men in a room together and expect them to be hygienic. The smell was horrible, and Techno found himself wishing - not for the first time - that the wall military gave out deodorant as a standard provision. Really, it was just terrible. It was a mix of musty mildew, milk that had gone off, and the strongest body odor you could imagine.

Gross.

Listen, Techno had seen some gross shit in his life, right? This though, this was bad. He'd emerged from battlefields covered in the entrails he'd ripped from still living bodies and the guts of a man who got hit by a cannon and honestly, he would have preferred that compared to what he was dealing with now.

The issue was only made worse by their daily activities. They were still training to build up muscle and endurance, which meant running, running, running. In other words, a lot of sweating, which leads to the worst stench you could picture.

It was suffice to say that the showers were often crowded.

"Eren if you don't get out of the shower soon I will come in there and *throw you out myself!*" Techno screamed over the sound of pounding water.

"I haven't even been in that long!" A voice screamed back.

"You have to keep it under five minutes or showering will take all gods damn day!"

"You made me get in here!"

"Because you smelled like fermented corn flakes!"

Jean - Techno had finally learned his name - snickered, "Come on Techno, let him take his time. After All, the only thing he's good at is wasting ours. Let him enjoy his only talent."

The entire room snickered.

"What did you say you bitch?!" Eren shouted.

"You heard me dumbass!"

Armin walked out of his own shower, letting Marco get in.

Techno narrowed his eyes, "Look! Armin can follow the five minute rule! Why can't you be more like your brother?"

"He's not even my brother!"

"Eren, I am not paid nearly enough to care!"

"You're not getting paid!"

"My point exactly. *Get out of the damn shower.*"

"No!"

Techno tapped his foot impatiently, " *Eren I swear to gods if you don't get out this second. . .*"

"You know what?!" the voice screamed, "I'm just going to stay in here until you two shut the fuck up!"

Techno put his hands on his hips, "Would you care to repeat that, brat?"

Faintly he heard Connie whisper *, "ooooh, dad's angry."*

Eren, apparently, could not take a hint, "You know what I said! I'm going to take my sweet sweet time and you're going to deal with it."

Techno yanked off his boots, "Alright thats *it!* I'm coming in there!"

"Fucking fine! I'll get out! Give me a minute!"

"Too Gods damn late for that brat!" he pulled off his shirt and threw it to the floor.

The room suddenly went quiet, the snickering dying down into dead silence. Now, Techno wouldn't call himself the most, ehem, *adept* at understanding social cues, but he could still tell something was wrong. Slowly he turned around to face the room. He found everybody staring at him with slowly widening eyes.

"What?" he asked.

"Dude," Connie said, "What the fuck happened to you?"

Techno looked down at his body. He didn't see anything wrong with it. It was just a normal torso, "I work out?" he tried.

"Not the muscle, you dope!" Connie exclaimed, "the scar! The one around your stomach and back!"

Oh, right. That. He had almost forgotten about that scar. He didn't really like to think about it. Being bitten in half really wasn't one of his top ten memories.

He looked down at his stomach. The wound hadn't healed pretty. A long, circular scar wrapped around his torso, like a silver bolt of lighting that cut across his skin. The wound had healed into a grayish hypertrophic scar, with some parts keloiding in a harsher pink. It wasn't a pleasant sight. Techno chastised himself for letting them see it. No one wanted to see something like that. He would have to be more careful about changing around people in the future.

He smiled awkwardly, "Oh right, that. Ha ha. Yeah i got it from a freak . . . penguin . . . accident."

"What's a pengui-" Connie started to ask, but was quickly cut off as Eren barged out of the shower. Techno had never been so grateful for Eren in his life.

"There! I'm out, Techno. Christ, who put a bee in your bonnet?" he looked around the room, blinked in confusion, then said, "why's everyone so quiet."

"No reason," Techno supplied, before ducking into the shower to avoid any more of their questions. He really, *really* didn't want to be grilled over that scar. It's story wasn't a particularly pleasant moment in his life, nor was it one he wanted to relive.

He turned the shower on, hoping to drown out his thoughts with the harsh water. Techno yelped.

THAT LITTLE BRAT USED ALL THE HOT WATER!

"Eren, I'm going to kick your ass!" he screamed, only to be met with the sound of laughter. It wasn't long before Chat started screeching in his head.

Technoswear

Potty mouth

Bad Techno! Bad! *Squirt bottle noises* Bad!

Technoswear

Technocurse

IM TELLING PHIL

He slammed his head against the wall.

—

There were days Levi couldn't stand to look at himself in the mirror.

He just couldn't muster up the strength to look himself in the eye, not after everything. He couldn't find it in himself to acknowledge the breaths he drew did not belong to him alone, that each step he took was on a road pathed for him, that someone died to let him live. Levi was a creature born from loss. He lost and lost and lost but never lost the one thing he wouldn't mind. What made him special? What made him keep going when his family, his friends, and everyone he cared about dropped around him? Why was he always the last one left, still pushing forward?

He was defined by survival. Levi was nothing more than the one who made it out. Everything else was stripped away and stolen from him. Everything but his life, which he could never seem to be rid of.

He never tried to take it himself though. So many had died to keep him alive, and he could never allow that to waste. Though, sometimes he thought it was a waste anyway. Why would people give up everything for him? Why couldn't they be selfish?

Sometimes, there were days Levi couldn't stand to look in the mirror. He couldn't deal with the reminder that the only reason he was still here was because some self sacrificing asshole deemed it so.

Techno was only gone because Levi was still alive.

It was his fault.

—

"The fundamental core of a soldier lies in the ODM gear," Shadis paced back and forth in front of the recruits. Behind him stood a large structure. It was rigged with a system of pulleys and wires, all of them leading to a harness hanging in the middle.

"Omni directional movement gear, or ODM gear for short, is the only weapon we have against the titans," Shadis explained, "Without it is impossible to fight them. For the next week you will be training on the simplest part of using the gear: balancing. Your proficiency for use of the gear will decide your aptitude as a soldier. It's do or die. Fail, and you can kiss the army goodbye."

Techno could cry! Finally. Finally! They were done with the running! Aw, there he goes.

"Dude, are you seriously crying?" Eren asked, "You weren't even struggling at it."

"Shut up Eren," Techno sniffled, "You'll understand one day."

Eren leaned away from him, " *Right.* "

"Cadet Jaeger!" Shadis snapped, "Since you seem so confident in your ability that you can talk over my lecture, you can go first."

Eren snapped to attention, "Yes sir!"

He walked up to the front, a smile steadily growing on his lips. Techno couldn't blame him. Eren's whole dream revolved around this moment. This was where he would prove himself, where he would learn to fight titans and eventually learn to kill them all. This was where he would become a hero. Despite his distaste for heroes, Techno hoped he would succeed.

Shadis handed the kid a harness and soon he was being clipped into the contraption.

Techno's fists tightened and his mouth tightened into a firm line. *Come on kid, come on.*

Shadis cranked up the wires, the pulleys slowly lifting Eren up into the air.

Eren's feet lifted off the ground. Just an inch.

Come on. You've got this.

And for a moment, he did. For a second, Eren held himself in the air, a grin on his face. *For a second.* All it took was one wobble, then the next second came and Eren was sent careening into the ground. All he got was a choked off shout before Shadis caught him by the collar.

He hovered there, face held a hair's breadth from the ground.

"Thank you cadet Jaeger," Shadis grunted, "For a perfect example of what *not* to do."

Techno sighed. This was going to be interesting.

—

Techno caught Eren just as he was about to hit the ground. He lifted the kid back up upright.

"Again," he said.

Eren growled in frustration, "I just can't get it!"

"Not yet."

"Yeah!" Armin agreed, "Even I was able to do it. You'll get it soon!"

"You three are good at it!" he exclaimed, "How do you do it?"

"You have to put your weight in your hips, not your feet," Mikasa provided.

"I am!"

"Try keeping the top right above the middle of your stomach. Imagine there's a line of string running down your entire body and try to keep it straight," Armin suggested, then blushed when he realized everyone was looking at him. He looked away and mumbled, "That's what worked for me."

"No," Techno said, "It's good advice."

"Advice that I'm following!" Eren shouted, "Nothing is working!"

He fell forward again. Techno caught him and tossed him back up.

"Rome wasn't built in a day, kid."

"What's Rome?" Armin asked.

Techno didn't bat an eye, "Doesn't matter. The point is that you can't expect things to work out immediately. Some people get talent. Some people have to work for skill. Some things take time, Eren."

"Oh sure," Eren muttered, "Like it took time for you and Mikasa."

"Believe it or not, it took me three straight days of practice to even balance," Techno said.

"You were literally doing backflips and shit during practice today. Three days my ass! You could balance as soon as you put this damn gear on for the first time!"

"Who said this was my first time using it?" Techno asked with a sly grin.

Eren lurched forward again. Techno didn't catch him this time. He let him hang upside down, glaring at the three of them.

"You need to be patient." Techno said, "You're trying to force things."

"I'm trying to be patient!"

"Try harder."

Techno righted the boy, holding him steady, "Do it again."

"I'm just going to fail again," Eren said petulantly.

"Maybe," Techno admitted, "But if you fail enough, you'll eventually get it right. We just need to get you to that point."

"What, so you're just going to let me keep falling until I miraculously stop?"

Techno smirked, "Essentially." With that, he let go.

Immediately, Eren fell over.

—

The nightmares did not stop. They had never really let up at all. They were one of the few constants in Techno's life. While the world changed and changed and changed, Techno stayed the same. Still plagued by nightmares, still terrified of the monster that lurked in his mind.

He was standing over a group of bodies, his hand slick and hot with blood. It coated the handle of his sword and dripped rubies from the blade. His chest heaved up and down, heart racing in his chest, beating surely with the life he held onto. The life he used to take others.

Why?

It was a question that often plagued his mind. Why did he do these things? Why did he crave it? Why did he kill? Why did he live? Why couldn't he remember any of it?

Why? Why? Why?

He could feel a pair of eyes on him, gaze hot against his back.

Techno slowed his breath. He calmed down the heart that was desperately trying to escape his chest. Breathe in, breathe out. It's just a dream.

"Don't just stand there," he said. Breathe in, breathe out, "Don't you have something to say?"

A voice laughed, **"We both know you don't care what I have to say."**

A figure stalked forward. They were shrouded in misty darkness. The more Techno tried to focus in on it, the more he tried to see it, the more unclear the details became. The figure had the kind of foggy unfocus that only a dream could carry with it. Oh, but those eyes. Techno could ever forget those eyes. They were black as night, only the iris glowing bright as silver.

The figure gestured to the bodies, **"Nice work."** *They stepped around the scene, taking in every detail,* **"A family this time. Oh, I remember them. Their screams were so sweet,"** *it locked eyes with Techno,* **"Shame you don't remember it."**

Techno scowled, "How do you know that?"

"How does anyone know anything?" *The figure asked,* **"I experienced it. I was there, *Techno*. I saw it firsthand. I did more than see, in fact."**

"You're saying that you killed them?" Techno asked, the blood on his hands growing cold.

The figure poked one of the bodies with its foot, **"No,"** *it said,* **"That was all you."**

"I wouldn't do this."

"See?" *It cocked its head,* **"Soon as you get an answer you don't like, you ignore what I tell you."**

Techno growled, "I Know *I wouldn't do this."*

It hummed, **"That is what you like to think."**

The shadows of the figure began to shift. They took a clearer form, one with a strong jawline, sharp teeth, and flowing hair.

"I would remember this." Techno denied.

"And yet you don't."

Color bled into the figure. The skin turned from ashen grey to a sickly pale beige. A wave of fresh crimson flashed through the hair, leaving behind a dusty pink that was oh so familiar.

Techno recoiled, "You know nothing about me!"

It turned to face him, all sharp grins and shattered mirrors. Its eyes were the same as they had always been, the sun's brightness invading the dark of midnight. Now though, a predatory gleam filled them, shining like starlight across a perversion of the night sky. Techno stared, slack jawed and horrified.

His own face stared back.

"Oh, love," *the figure purred,* **"I know E̷v̷e̷r̷y̷t̷h̷i̷n̷g̷."**

Techno snapped his eyes open. One hand was twisted into someone's jacket, the other was holding a knife to a recruit's throat. The recruit stared at him with wide eyes, sweat beading upon his brow. Tears gathered at the corners of their eyes, threatening to spill over at any second. Beneath his hands they shook like a leaf in the wind, terror wracking through the body in harsh waves.

He knew this boy. Marco, his mind provided.

Breathe in, breathe out.

He was fine. He wasn't in danger. No one was hurt. His name was Technoblade and he was in control.

Breathe in, breathe out.

Techno looked around the room, finding only shocked and horrified faces staring at him. He quickly singled out the small blond haired boy. He pinned him with a questioning look.

How did this happen?

"Sorry," Armin whispered, "I *tried* to warn him against waking you up."

Techno lowered the knife from Marco's throat and let him go. He dusted off Marco's clothes, "Sorry," he apologized, "I didn't grow up in the nicest place. I tend to startle when woken up. Force of habit. My bad, Marco."

"W-Were your eyes b-black?" Marco stuttered.

Techno's lips flicked down quickly before he smoothed out his expression. He shrugged, "Must've been a trick of the light."

"But-"

Techno cut him off harshly, "I said, *trick of the light.*"

No one dared to argue with him. For that, Techno was grateful.

—

"I'll never be able to do it."

It was just Eren and Techno today. Mikasa and Armin had gone off to lunch while the two of them stayed behind to keep working.

"You will," Techno promised. He was holding Eren by the shoulders so he wouldn't fall.

"I have two days left," Eren said, "If I can't do it by then then I'll be kicked out. What do I do then?"

"Hypotheticals are an extraordinarily useless waste of time, Eren."

"What's wrong with me? Why can't I do it Techno?"

Techno took a moment to ponder it, "I think it started from birth actually... that's when it all started going downhill." He looked up to find Eren glaring at him. He winced, "Sorry."

Eren scoffed, "Thanks for the vote of confidence."

Techno sighed, "Listen kid. You're right. You're pretty much screwed. If you don't pull your act together you can kiss the scouts goodbye."

"You're an asshole Tech-"

"No, let me finish," he interrupted, "You don't have time, Eren. You've got two days, if even. You don't have time to be sitting around, wallowing in your self pity going 'will I, won't I' on loop. You don't have that luxury. So, here's what you're gonna do. You're gonna quit whining, and work. I don't care if you keep falling. You are going to get back up and try again. Got it?"

Eren swallowed, then nodded "Got it."

"Good, now I'm going to let go, alright?"

He nodded again. Techno let go.

Eren fell over again.

—

The potato farm was going well. The plants had grown strong and sturdy in the field. They brought with them a certain nostalgia. Farming was admittedly something he missed. Growing the taters had reminded him of a simpler time, long before the Empire, long before the SMP. Back when it was just Techno and his plants. His life was calmer then.

"I gotta admit," Sasha said, "You've got a real knack for growin' these things."

"I would be appalled if I didn't," Techno responded, "I spent a good portion of my life growing them."

Sasha laughed, "It shows. These little guys are growing better than most crops I've seen! Some of the best potato plants out there I bet."

"Should the day ever come that I grow anything less than superb," Techno kneeled down and pulled a weed from the base of one of the plants, "You can just go ahead and shoot me."

"You're in the right hands then. I'm the best shot in my whole village."

"You're good with a bow?"

"My village mostly subsisted on hunting. I'm a little better than *good,*" she suddenly blushed, "Not to brag or anything! I'm sure there's so many people better than me! I'm just decent at it, you know? Not anything special."

Techno hummed, turning his attention back to the plants. "The potatoes should be ready to harvest soon. Probably in the next few days. We'll be eating good in no time."

Sasha licked her lips, "Just imagine all the things we can eat. Boiled potatoes. Mashed potatoes. Fried potatoes. Baked potatoes. Roasted potatoes. Potato salad. Potato soup. Potato fries. . ."

Techno let her continue to mutter. By the time they were done tending to the plants, she had listed 456 ways to eat a potato. He kept count.

—

"No."

The scene before him was bloody as always. He should be desensitized to it by now. He should be. He saw this everyday. Saw it every night. For the longest time his life had been filled with nothing but blood and violence. It was the norm. He should be used to it by now. He wasn't.

"I know I didn't do this," he said to himself. It was two children. Barely over six. A sister and brother, clutching each other tight in their arms, blood pooling out from under their forms.

"This wasn't me. I didn't." he wouldn't. He had control. He would never do this.

They were children. Children! He remembers when Tommy and Wilbur were this small, running between his legs, giggles filling the air. Things were easier then, happier too. Back when they were a family. He wouldn't kill a child. He knew he wouldn't.

But the evidence was damning. It was all so real. The heat, the screams, the color, the blood. It was so real that his mind couldn't comprehend it's reality as a dream. Techno forced himself to believe it was only a dream, not a memory. He couldn't live with himself if it was a memory. He knew he wouldn't, didn't.

And yet, despite all he knew, a voice still whispered in his head.

"You did."

—

Excitement buzzed through the air.

The recruits were crowded around the ODM gear machines, all watching with rapt attention as their fellow trainees completed their test. Some succeeded, smiles beaming on their faces. Some failed, and an air of gloom rippled through the crowd as they were told to pack their things.

Today was the big day. If Eren didn't manage to balance on the ODM gear then he would be sent home. Ha! 'Home.' Everytime Eren thought about that word he laughed. He didn't have a home anymore. His home was miles away, buried in a pile of rubble, a blood soaked wreckage. The closest thing he had to a home was Mikasa and Armin, both of which had passed the balance test. He wouldn't be sent home if he failed, he would be torn from it.

More than that, if he didn't pass the test then he could never achieve his dream. What hope did he have to make the titan's pay if he couldn't even balance with the stupid gear? It was a harsh reality to acknowledge, that maybe he couldn't do the things he thought he could.

A gentle hand knocked on his skull.

"Get out of your own head, Eren." Techno said.

He scowled, "I'm not."

Techno frowned softly, "You are. What's wrong, kid?"

Eren looked away.

"Come on, you can tell old grandpa Technoblade."

"You're twenty seven!"

"Open up Eren. What worries trouble your mind?"

Eren sighed, turning back to face Techno, "This is stupid."

"No," Techno said, nodding over to Jean who was scratching his ass, "Jean is stupid. Your feelings are not, cringe as they may be."

"Thanks."

"Just tell me what you're worried about Eren."

Eren sighed again, "It's just- what if I can't do it, you know?"

Techno shrugged, "Then that's that. I can't juggle, do you see me moping about it? There are things in life that I can't do, and I'm okay with that."

"But this is what I'm meant to do!" Eren exclaimed, "I just know it! Even before what happened in Shiganshina. Ever since I was a kid I wanted to see what was beyond those walls, wanted to see the ocean in Armin's book, wanted to be free of the walls. I was meant to do this, and now it looks like I never will."

Techno frowned, "There's nothing you're *meant* to do, Eren. Fate, destiny, they're all made up concepts. The only one who can decide what you do with your life is you."

"And I'm deciding that I want to free humanity! What am I supposed to do if I can't do that."

"Grow potatoes?" Techno suggested.

"Very funny Techno." God, the older man could be such an asshole.

"I'm serious, Eren. The world is so much bigger than fighting. There's so many things you can do, so many ways to be happy."

"I will *never* be happy until all titans are dead," Eren spat.

Techno sighed and grabbed Eren's shoulders, squeezing them comfortingly, "Then I'm sure you'll be able to do it."

"But what if I *can't-*"

"Shh," Techno shushed him, "Don't worry about that. Eren, do you want to know the most annoying thing about you?"

"What the fuck does that have to do with anything?"

Techno continued unaffected, "It's the fact that you never give up. No matter how many people beat you down, you always get back up. You don't care if everyone says you can't do it, you'll try, and then you'll try and try and try again until you get it. When the odds are stacked immeasurably against you, you still fight. It's both admirable and fucking annoying." Techno winced, *"Freaking* annoying."

He huffed, "What I'm trying to say is that if anyone can do this, it's you Eren," Techno smiled, "I believe in you, kid."

Eren was speechless for a moment, then, "You mean it?"

"I do," Techno slapped him on the back, "Now get up there. It's your turn."

Eren nodded and started trotting up to the front of the crowd. He paused suddenly, and turned to look back, "Techno?"

"Yeah kid?"

He smiled, "Thank you."

Techno waved him off, but he was smiling too, "Don't mention it."

—

Shadis would consider himself a fair man. He believed that everyone had a chance to succeed. He believed everyone had the potential to be great, to have a spark of something *incredible* in them. He tried to help his recruits find it. He tried to make sure everyone could find it.

His hand clutched around a screwdriver. The very same one he used to break Eren Jaeger's gear.

Shadis was a fair man. So why did he sabotage Jaeger? It was a question he asked himself again and again. Why? Why did he do it? Should he have done it? Why?

Maybe it was the leftover love he had for a woman long gone. Oh, Carla. His heart was heavy with her death everyday. Was it a love for her that caused him to sabotage the boy? Was it jealousy that he lost her to Eren's father? Was it hate for the boy himself? He knew it was the first. He knew it the moment he decided to go through with the plan.

Eren Jaeger was the only thing left of Carla Jaeger. He didn't want to see that go.

Oh, he knew about the boy's plans to join the scouts. It was hard not to when he talked about it every chance he got. As a former commander of the scouts, Shadis had never heard of a dumber idea. He would get himself killed. First expedition, he was willing to put money on it. Hero types always died first.

The only way to save the boy was to stop him before he even began.

He made it impossible for him to succeed, breaking the most important piece of the ODM gear for balance. It would be impossible to stay upright for even a second in it now. And it worked! He could never stay upright. Every attempt he made failed. Every dream, suddenly unachievable. All hope he had, crushed. His spark snuffed.

So why, *why,* was Eren Jaeger still trying. Why did he stride up to the front so confidently, determination still burning bright in his eye. Why was his spark now a roaring flame? Why? Why? Why? Why? *Why?!*

"Cadet Jaeger," he regarded the boy coolly.

"Instructor Shadis," he responded in kind.

"Are you sure you want to attempt this?" he asked, "Given the past predicts the future, wouldn't you rather spare yourself the embarrassment? You can go back to the barracks, pack up, and pretend like this little military stint of yours ever happened."

"Tempting offer," Eren said, "but I think I'll have to pass."

The boy clipped himself into the machine.

"Are you sure?"

"Quite."

Shadis huffed, "Cadet Wagner, lift Jaeger up."

Thomas Wagner nodded from his place at the crank, and began reeling Eren up.

Shadis knew what would happen. He made sure it would happen. Eren would fall, fail the test and be sent home, ego thoroughly bruised. He would be *safe.* Carla would still be alive, living on in her son. He knew it would happen. He knew it should.

Then why? Why didn't it?

Eren was balancing, wobbling just slightly, wires quivering with his weight. It was unsteady at best, and hardly up to par, but by Goddesses, he was balancing. Why?

Then, as all things do, his victory came to an end. After barely ten seconds, he toppled forward and fell, just like Shadis had planned. He would be safe.

A hushed murmur went through the crowd, and Shadis could swear he saw Eren's heart crack. The boy was done for. He would never graduate, never join the scouts, never achieve his dream, but he would never *die.* He would be heartbroken, miserable and alive.

"Cadet Wagner!" Shadis barked, "Switch belts with Jaeger!"

Thomas was confused for a moment, but did as he was told.

Soon Eren was strapped back in and balancing perfectly, not a single wobble in sight.

Shadis looked at the belt in his hands. Eren's old one.

"The fitting was broken, making it impossible for Cadet Jaeger to balance," Shadis said, "I've never seen this part break before. I'll have to add it to the maintenance checklist."

Eren looked down at him, smiling uncertainly, "So does this mean. . . ?"

Shadis nodded, "You pass."

Cheers broke out through the crowd. Eren Jaeger would be staying in the military. He would reach the scouts. All because of Shadis.

So why? Why did he do it?

Shadis was head of the scouts for years. He recognized a losing battle when he saw one. Trying to stop Eren from trying was like trying to stop a river from flowing. It was impossible. No matter how many times he failed, the boy just got back up and tried again. The more times someone tried to snuff out the spark in his eyes, it only burned brighter.

Carla was well and alive in her boy, her stubbornness shining through in everything he did.

Maybe, just maybe, that would be enough to keep him alive.

In the end it was out of Shadis' hands. He couldn't do anything to stop Eren from choosing to fight. It wasn't something he could control anymore. Perhaps it never was.

—

After the ODM aptitude test their days grew busier. Their time was split into three main subjects, titan Lectures, ODM gear Practice, and hand to hand combat.

Titan Lectures. Also called the academic class, made Techno want to cry. He was a student of the arts. He read Epics, enjoyed plays, poetry, books, and of course was proficient in the art of war. He wasn't great at the whole 'student' thing. He hadn't been to school in probably thousands of years. He understood the concept of killing titans, he just couldn't put it in a format that worked for the class.

"How do you free a soldier stuck in the jaws of a titan?" The teacher asked, eyes scanning over the room before pinning on him, "Cadet Technoblade? Would you care to answer or just stare out the window."

Techno turned his attention back to the room, "Uh, you would cut the jaw muscle?"

"Close, Cadet Blade, but please use proper terminology."

Armin's hand shot up.

"Yes Cadet Arlert?"

"The titan jaw has five muscles that control it." Armin said, "The masseter major, masseter minor, the masseter anterior, masseter posterior and the keifer sperren. The masseter major is the largest and strongest of the five, while the keifer sperren locks the jaw in place when fully biting down. You would need to sever those two to rescue the soldier."

"Correct Cadet Arlert!" they praised, "I hope your example can help inspire some other. . . *less enthusiastic* students."

Techno rolled his eyes. He basically said what Armin did. It would work in application.

"Thank you instructor!" Armin responded, grin bright on his face.

Well, at least someone was enjoying the class. He was probably the only one, but nevertheless, Techno was happy for him.

ODM practice he actually enjoyed, unlike the boring academic class.

"Cadet Blade, stop fooling around!" Shadis shouted, "Your teammates are carrying the entire team!"

They were playing a common game that they used for training. It was called the titan race. The first team to reach fifty titan kills would win. They weren't real titan's mind you, just giant wooden cutouts in the vague shape of a titan. They could be moved around by a person at the base and had a soft spot to slice on their nape. They were split into two teams, red and blue. Techno was on red.

He was also currently hanging upside down, like a spider hanging from a web, doing absolutely nothing. In his defense, he didn't want to make the teams too uneven. Not to toot his own horn, but he did spend a considerable amount of time stuck in a titan ridden forest. He was rather good at killing them.

"I'm not fooling around!" Techno shouted back, "I'm planning my attack!"

"I swear to Goddess if you don't kill a titan in the next minute I'm going to fail your entire team."

Reiner landed on a branch beside him. He was also on red.

"Techno, please," he said, "just try."

Techno didn't really like Reiner and his posse. All three of them, Reiner, Bertold, and Annie rubbed him the wrong way. He didn't know what it was about them, but something just screamed *'wrong!'* at him. But, his- *the kids* were friends with them. He didn't want to say anything about it if it caused a rift between them. He didn't want to do that to them.

Techno narrowed his eyes, then schooled his expression back to one of relaxation and joking, "Come on! Can't a guy just *hang around?"*

"Very funny."

He sighed, looked like he wouldn't get out of this. "Fine," he said, "But don't blame me for what happens."

He zipped off, a blur of red and metal.

In the end, red team won fifty to twenty-three.

Hand to hand combat was by far Techno's favorite subject. Why? Because he got to sleep through it.

He wasn't the only one either. Annie also used the time to take a nap. Maybe Techno was wrong about her. She wasn't so bad.

Someone poked him in the cheek.

"I swear to *gods* Eren!" he found himself shouting, "I already told you I am not going to teach you how to break someone's leg! If you interrupted my sleep for that again I'm going to kill you-"

He cracked open a tired eye. It was Mikasa.

He brightened, "Oh! Mikasa! Sorry bout that. What do you need?"

"Sorry to wake you," she apologized, "But no one wants to partner up with me. Do you mind?"

"Of course not." he stood up, taking in the rest of the field, finding a considerable number of recruits on the ground, sporting some nasty looking bruises, "Did you do this?" he asked.

She nodded.

Techno smiled, "Ha! I knew there was a reason you were my favorite!"

"Eh," A voice said, "I'm more partial to Armin."

Techno turned around, finding Annie - who he previously thought was sleeping - with one tired eye cracked open and staring at them.

"Really?" he asked, "What's wrong with Mikasa?"

"She's got the whole 'in love with her brother' thing going on. It's annoying."

Techno spun around to face Mikasa, " *Wait you're in love with Eren!?*"

Mikasa blushed. That wasn't a no. If anything that was a yes. *Christ.*

"He's your brother!" he exclaimed.

"Adopted, technically," she corrected.

"Mikasa, my dude, that does not make it *any better.*" he sighed, "I am not paid enough for this. Mikasa, go grab us some knives. We'll talk about this later."

She nodded and ran off.

"So," Annie said once Mikasa was out of earshot, "You really didn't know?"

"Does it look like I did?!"

"How?" Annie asked, "It was so obvious?"

"Love makes you blind," Techno explained, "as we can see with Mikasa - *apparently* - being in love with Eren. Setting aside the fact he's her *brother,* she could do so much better than him."

Annie snorted.

"Yeah, laugh it up." Techno groused, "Thanks for ruining my day."

She snorted again, "If *that* ruins your day you're going to have a very tough time in life."

"Wait, it gets worse?" Techno said, a haunted look on his face, "Don't tell me Armin is in love with Eren too!"

"Thankfully he is not," Annie said, "He would be lower on the list if that were the case."

"Oh thank Gods."

"Gods?" Annie asked, "Y- *We* worship Goddesses."

Techno paused, "Not everyone does."

"Are you in a cult or something?"

"No. Have started a few by accident though." he stopped suddenly, " *Hey stop trying to get me off topic!* I'm still upset at you for ruining my day!"

She sighed, resting her chin in the palm of her hand, looking utterly done with the world, "Is there any way I could make up for it?"

Techno looked across the training yard, "you could punch Eren."

"Why? It's not his fault Mikasa is weird."

Techno narrowed his eyes, "Somehow, I feel like it is."

Annie huffed but complied. She walked over, tapped Eren on the shoulder and exchanged a few words with him. After a moment they both got into fighting stances.

Techno will admit, his day was ruined thanks to Annie dropping that truth bomb on him, but it was almost, *almost* made better when he got to see Annie sock Eren in the jaw. Oh yeah, he was filing that under favorite memories.

There was a reason hand to hand combat was his favorite subject.

—

Mikasa ran her fingers through pink hair. The ends were all uneven and shaggy. They were cut haphazardly with a knife, and the locks didn't hold the beauty they once did. Still, Mikasa loved to braid them.

"Why do you always do this?" Techno asked. It was a familiar conversation, "You know it'll get covered up with the cloth, right?"

"I know that," she said.

"Then why?"

"It makes me happy," she said, placing a flower in one of the braids, "And I know it makes you happy too."

"It does not!"

She pinned him with a look.

He sighed, relenting, "It does."

Mikasa smiled.

—

They were being assigned horses today. You would think that they would just draw lots or something, randomly assigning cadets with a horse. In a surprising display of competence, they didn't do that.

Techno was frankly impressed with Shadis. The man understood that each horse was different, and each needed a different kind of rider to bring out their potential. An energetic horse might need help calming down, so a level headed rider would be most suited to it. A more stubborn horse needed a rider with drive and energy.

Techno watched as Eren got bucked off a horse for the fifth time.

And some riders just needed the horse to do all the work for them. A good rider can work with any horse. A shitty rider . . . . couldn't.

Warm breath settled over his shoulder and a nose nuzzled into the crook of his neck.

Techno turned around to find a large chestnut horse. Its mane was dark and shaggy, cascading down its neck in a wavy waterfall. It was a lovely shade of brown too, rich and warm like cinnamon, with a white star laying in the middle of its forehead.

"Well aren't you the most beautiful thing," Techno said, hands coming up to pet its face. He bent down. *His face* , he amended. The horse leaned into the touch, head swaying into his hand.

"Ey!" One of the stablehands shouted, running over to him, "be careful!"

They got in between Techno and the horse, "This one's really violent. He don't let anyone ride him. Best to stay away. Last rider ended up with more than a few broken bones."

Techno smiled, stepping forward to resume petting the horse, "I don't know. He seems lovely to me."

The stablehand frowned, "Let me tell you, he ain't. More demon than horse, he is."

Techno scratched the horse's neck, "Adds personality, no?" The horse whinnied, as if agreeing.

They snorted, "Whatever. If you want ta get yourself killed, be my guest. That horse is no good."

Techno hummed thoughtfully, "What's his name?"

"Chemosh," They answered, "But we just call him Carl."

Techno smiled, eyes bright, "I was right. He really is a fine horse."

—

It was harvest day. The potatoes that came out of the ground were robust and - dare he say it - regal. Some of the best he'd ever farmed.

Sasha and him quickly built a fire and tossed a few spuds into the coals. Techno had managed to catch a wood pigeon earlier that afternoon, which they put on a spit over the fire.

When they finally feasted on the fruits of their labor, both of them cried. It was so much better than the literal gruel they ate every night for dinner. And breakfast. And lunch, if they got it. There really wasn't much variety in their diet.

"Gods I love potatoes," he muttered through a mouthful of pigeon and potato.

Sasha tore through her meat in seconds, tears and grease running tracks down her chin. She bit off large chunks of potato in every hungry bite, "Techno, I could kiss you."

He laughed, "A thank you is enough."

"A hug then?"

"I'm good.

"Too late!"

Techno barely had time to dodge before Sasha launched herself at him.

The day ended with Techno being chased around by Sasha, her arms open wide, screaming "TAKE MY APPRECIATION!"

Techno ducked under another hug, "NO!"

—

Levi rubbed his thumb over a small carved pig. Through the years it had grown worn from the action, its edges smoothing out into soft curves. The name carved at the bottom was barely legible anymore, but it didn't matter. Levi had memorized every stroke a long time ago.

He missed Techno.

It was hard to admit sometimes, but it was true.

Not a day went by that he didn't miss him. He mourned him every day.

Grief was supposed to fade. That's what people always said. It would get easier. But it didn't, not for Levi. Every day was like the first, the pain always fresh. His mom, Isabel, Farlan, and Techno. Each death left a deep wound on his heart, one that never healed to form a scar. They left him to bleed out.

Levi rubbed his thumb over a small carved pig. He missed his friend.

—

"Cadet Leonhart! Cadet Blade!" Shadis shouted, "Pair up."

They both groaned and got up, muttering under their breath. Hey, Techno didn't sleep well. He needed all the rest he could get.

"Do we have to?" he asked.

"Yes," Shadis said, "If you talk back to me one more time, I'm making you clean the shower stalls."

Techno mulled it over. In the end he decided against sassing Shadis. Those stalls were foul.

He turned to Annie, "Guess it's you and me."

Annie frowned, "Joy."

She dropped into a fighting stance.

"Hey, it's not like I'm exactly overjoyed about this either," he mimicked her stance. They commenced the fight.

"I would much rather be sleeping right now," he admitted, circling around her.

"Do you insist on constantly talking?" She aimed a punch at his head.

He ducked and tried to sweep her legs out from under her, "You can blame my brother for that particular trait of mine."

Annie danced away from the attack, putting space between them, "You have brothers?" three quick jabs at him, "I never heard you talking about them."

He feinted a punch, then followed it up with one just below her sternum, "Not really raring to bring it up."

The punch connected. Annie grunted and jumped away, "Sensitive topic?" she wheezed.

Techno didn't let up, continuing to chase and attack her, "You could say that."

Annie went in for her signature tackle. Techno didn't move, letting her think she had him and fully committing to the move. Then, right before she reached him, he twisted out of the way. Momentum carried her forward, and she was thrown off balance.

Techno grabbed her and kneed her several times in the stomach. She tried to get up, grimacing from the pain. A punch came flying at his face. He ducked out of the way, twisting his body behind her's and putting her in a chokehold.

She struggled against his grip, trying to punch and claw at him.

He smiled through it, "Do you really think that's going to work?"

She shifted her attention to trying to pry his arms away from her neck.

"Annie, we both know I'm physically stronger than you," he said, tightening his arms, "Do you yield?"

She continued to struggle, growing panicked.

"Tap out or pass out my guy," he said simply.

Her face was growing red.

"The choice is yours"

Annie slapped him on the arm two times. Techno let her go instantly. She was left on the floor, gasping and rubbing at her neck. Techno offered her a hand up. After a moment and a glare, she took it.

"You really don't pull punches, do you?" She said, still rubbing her throat.

He shrugged, "Not like you were. You're a good fighter. You should be proud."

"Yeah," Annie grunted, "My father taught me. Who taught you?"

"Experience," he said, "Time."

"Really," she raised a brow, "Time? You expect me to believe that level of skill came from time? You're easily the best I've fought."

"Eh, you might not like it, but it's true," he smiled, "You're certainly up on my list yourself. You've got some real talent."

"Oh?" she cocked her head, "Who's above me?"

"A couple old friends," he said, "The only one you'd know is already a soldier. He's in the scouts. One of the best fighters out there."

"Is that the guy you're trying to find?" She asked.

He nodded.

"He's in the scouts," Annie said, "Have you ever considered that he might not be. You know. . . living. . anymore."

He laughed lowly, expression darkening, "Oh, he's alive." he muttered, "I made damn sure of that myself."

—

Techno knew this would happen. He knew it was inevitable, that it would eventually come about.

"Dude," Connie said, holding a scrap of red fabric in his hand, "What the actual fuck."

Techno growled and snatched the fabric back. Connie didn't even try to stop him, instead gazing at him with a slack jawed expression.

It had started out as a question. 'Techno why do you always cover your hair?' It was a simple question with a rather complicated answer. One he did not provide. The question next became a mystery. 'Why does Techno cover his hair? Why won't he tell us?' People whispered, passing around their theories. 'Maybe he's self conscious.' Soon it was a favorite pastime, trying to answer the mystery. There had been many long nights, listening to the younger recruits trying to figure it out. Then, it became a joke. 'Techno, what are you, bald or something? Bet that's it.' Chat enjoyed that one.

Baldnoblade

HA! They think you have receding hairline

Technobald

:0 Technobald

Technobald

/rainbowchat

Technobald

Finally, the question became a mission. Who could pull the fabric off first. It was kind of cute at first, Techno had to admit. Watching the kids run around trying to snatch the fabric off his head and laughing at them when they failed miserably. Of course, things couldn't stay cute. The kids started to team up - even Sasha was participating now. Traitor. - He would just be sitting down, trying to eat some soup, when five kids all attacked him. Techno had been jumped eight times the past week. *Eight!* What the heck?!

He had to be constantly vigilant now. Always watching his back. Techno was good at telling when he was about to be attacked, not- *not whatever this was!* What was worse was dispatching the kids. He couldn't kill them, not that he wanted to. He couldn't seriously harm them either. He had to be gentle, which if he was being honest, is much *much* harder than just maiming someone. It takes a surprising amount of effort.

All and all, it took a lot of work to keep his hair covered now. In the end, he knew the cat would eventually get out of the bag.

Which led him to this moment, with a room full of kids staring at him, bewildered.

"Your hair is *pink?!"* Connie exclaimed.

Techno fixed the cloth back on his head, "No, why would you think that?"

"Cuz I just saw it and it's definitely pink!"

"Congrats, Connie," Techno deadpanned, "You can see color. Good job."

"Do you not see the significance of this?" Connie sputtered, "Your hair is pink! Like actually pink! Not strawberry blond or something! This is crazy."

Techno snapped, "I *know* Connie! I kept it covered for a reason!"

"Wait- That's not what I-"

"No," Techno growled, "This is how people always react. Frankly I'm tired of it. I get it, I do. 'He's crazy! He's dangerous! He's unnatural!' If you don't care for it then you shouldn't have tried to find out what I was trying to hide, because nine times out of ten what I'm hiding is hidden for a reason-"

"Techno, would you stop talking for two seconds!" Connie interrupted.

Techno gaped, before shutting his mouth.

"I was trying to say that I didn't mean it like that!" he explained, "It's not a bad kind of crazy. It's a cool kind of crazy. Like- like how crazy good Mikasa is at fighting! It's weird, and kind of bonkers, but it's awesome! Sure, it's fucking unatural, but we're training to fight giant man eating monsters! I think I can handle a little weird."

"Wait," Techno said, "So you *don't* hate it?"

Connie shook his head.

Techno looked around the room, finding no one disputing the sentiment, "None of you mind?"

They all followed in Connie's example, shaking their heads and shouting out exclamations of 'Nah, it's cool!' and 'Why would we mind?' Techno found Mikasa in the crowd, meeting her eye with a questioning look.

She tilted her head, "I told you it was pretty."

He found himself dumbstruck, "So no 'off with his head!' 'burn the witch!'?"

Connie laughed, "No! Why would we do that."

A memory flitted across Techno's mind. One involving a lot of fire, pyres and screaming 'I'm not a witch! If anything I would be a wizar- OH NO! NO DO NOT PUT THAT TORCH NEAR ME-" Fun times.

Techno chuckled awkwardly, "Uh, no reason?"

—

Time passed quicker after that.

He didn't cover his hair anymore, and the intrigue shifted from 'what is he hiding' to 'that's so cool' to eventually it becoming normal. It was nice, not hiding something for a change. As a bonus, Mikasa's braids were put proudly o, which made her happy. He wouldn't admit it, but it made him happy too.

The days all seemed to blur together in a pleasant sort of monotony. Techno still hated titan Lectures, crushed ODM practice, and napped through hand to hand combat. The other recruits never admitted it, but they were glad he did. The few times Shadis forced him to participate his

partner ended up with more than a wounded ego and few bruises. He threw Reiner into a wall once. Needless to say, Shadis didn't force him to participate anymore.

He, Armin, Mikasa, and Eren still ate together and trained together. It had ended up in more than a few squabbles.

"Techno you need to put more effort into class." Armin complained.

"I put in effort," he said, affronted.

"Techno, yesterday the teacher asked how to kill a titan. You said to 'stop it from living'"

"Was I wrong?"

"That's not the point!"

Techno did not, in the end, find out what 'the point' actually was. He stopped listening after Armin had said the words, "You'll die if you don't pay attention blah blah blah blah blah." Eh, he'd died once - or almost died? He didn't know, it was very confusing - It didn't seem that big of a deal. He voiced as such to Armin. All he got was a frustrated scream in return.

Techno had laughed, something weird in his chest, all warm and fuzzy. It took him a while to realize what it was. Techno was happy. It was a weird feeling. Not exactly unfamiliar, but strange nonetheless. He wasn't used to being happy. He decided he liked it.

—

Riding Carl was like flying.

He was the fastest horse out of the bunch. Hardy too, being able to ride for absurdly long amounts of time.

Galloping across open plains made him feel near weightless, as if he was floating above it all. Carl liked it too, taking the infinitely spanning landscape as a challenge.

He both outran and outlasted the other horses, surpassing them in every front.

Techno laughed to himself. Demon horse indeed.

—

"I think I finally realize what bugs me about you," Techno said.

Annie cracked open an eye, "I'm trying to sleep here."

"Aren't we all." He muttered, "But back to my epiphany. I finally understand."

"Oh?" she opened both eyes, "Do enlighten me."

"You're dangerous." he said, as if he was discussing the weather, "Very dangerous in fact. Everytime I look at you my hair stands on end. You're like a sleeping tiger; there's pure power hidden in you, underneath that innocent look you like to put up."

He looked over to her, finding wide eyes and grim set lips, "Oh stop looking so surprised. You don't do a great job of hiding it."

"How?" It was a simple question yet was packed with so much more meaning than the single word could hold. It was sharp and deadly, hissed through, a grimset mouth.

Techno shrugged, "Monster recognises monster."

She grit her teeth, "What are you going to do about it?"

"Absolutely nothing." he said, "All I know is that you're dangerous. That's not damning in itself. For all I know, you could be a baker who's just good with a knife. Nothing more. Innocent until proven guilty and all that."

Annie laughed cruelly, "You'll find Techno, that the world tends to judge guilty until proven innocent."

"I know," he looked at her, "But just because that's how the world is doesn't mean it's the way *I* have to be."

Techno turned his attention to the training recruits. Armin was stifling a laugh as Mikasa put Eren in a chokehold. They looked so happy, like kids should.

"The kids like you," he said, "Well, Mikasa might not like you after you tackled Eren for the third time, but Armin and Eren sure do. I'm not going to ruin that simply because you're dangerous. I know what it's like to be like that. I don't want to harm people, but I could. I'm willing to assume the same for you."

Eren tapped out and Mikasa helped him up. They were smiling.

"I won't act against you Annie. Call it camaraderie for a fellow monster," Techno's eyes sharpened, "However, Annie, should you *ever* try to hurt my kids, I will kill you. Simple as that."

She forced herself to scoff, "Simple as that? I thought you said I was dangerous?"

"Oh, you are." he smiled. It was not a pretty smile, *"But I'm worse."*

—

"Techno is dangerous," Reiner murmured. The moonlight was harsh on him, casting him in a shattered silhouette. It cut in harsh lines across his hair and eyes, illuminating him hatefully.

Annie couldn't help but agree with the moon. She hated these meetings, she hated this mission, and by God, she hated Reiner.

"He's wary of us," he continued, "We've given him no reason to be so, and yet he is always watching us. You've seen it too, haven't you? The way he always keeps an eye on us when we're in the same room."

Bertolt rubbed his arm, "Yeah. He's relatively nice to everyone, but I tried to talk to him once and he was just. . . . *cold.* He looked almost angry."

"That's what I'm talking about!" Reiner exclaimed, "He knows. I don't know how but he knows! He's a risk. We need to take care of him before we move, or he might ruin our mission."

Silence settled through the room, thick and heavy, as it always did when the mission was brought up. They didn't like to talk about it. It was a grim reminder that every aspect of their life in the walls was a lie. Every oath they took here would be broken, every friend they made, betrayed, every one of their comrades, they would eventually kill. Their entire personalities here were nothing more than shams. A tool they used to bring destruction.

After a minute, Annie broke the silence, "You're overreacting,"

Reiner cast a glance her way, "Annie, he's dangerous! He's *unnatural!* He has red eyes and pink hair for Christ's sake! I don't know what he is, but he is *not* from the walls and he is *not* safe to keep around."

"He doesn't suspect a thing," Annie dismissed.

"He is wary of all of us-!"

"Not me," She interrupted, "He talks to me. Likes me."

Reiner scowled, "Then why is he so adverse to me and Bertolt?"

"Really? With your and Bertolt's whole conjoined twin act I'm surprised more people don't hate you. It's creepy, the way you two are always together." she sneered, "Not everyone has to like you, Reiner. People can find your whole big brother act annoying without being a risk to the mission. I swear, your ego is so fragile."

"That does not excuse how dangerous he is," Reiner pressed.

"And? He can kill fake titans! I wouldn't exactly call that dangerous!"

"Don't you see how he could destroy us!"

"No," she hissed, "You're the one who doesn't see. You blind yourself with fear and convince yourself that you've elevated your sight. Techno is just a weird dude. You're blowing this out of proportion. He doesn't know about us. He just hates you for, frankly, understandable reasons."

"I-I'm going to agree with Annie on this one," Bertolt jumped in, "Techno's wary, but he doesn't *know.* I don't see the harm in letting him go."

Reiner frowned deeply. After a moment, he said, "Fine. We'll let him go." he turned to Annie, "But if this blows up in our faces you're the one to blame."

"It won't," She said, secretly breathing a sigh of relief.

Why did she do that? She openly lied to them about Techno, something that actually *could* jeopardize the mission. But. . . He didn't judge her. That was a first. Her entire life was a set of expectations and judgments. She was judged guilty for being an Eldian. She was expected to kill and be a warrior.

To be neither of those, even when part of her nature was known, was. . . . nice.

Besides, Techno hadn't ratted her out. She was just returning the favor. They were even now. She wouldn't help him anymore.

—

Armin hated himself sometimes. It feels gross to hate one's self. It felt like you were trapped in mud, constantly stuck with the slimy feeling of self loathing, practically suffocating in your own incompetence.

Armin knew he would never be particularly good at anything. It was just one of those facts of life. Sky is blue, the walls were fifty meters tall, and Armin wasn't special. When he was a kid he always had to rely on Mikasa and Eren to defend him. From the beginning, he was useless like that. Destined to be a burden from birth.

It wasn't that he didn't try to keep up, it was that no matter how much effort he put in, he never caught up. While Mikasa, Eren, and Techno all succeeded and did amazing things, he was the dead weight they had to pull along with him.

He sucked at combat, he sucked at physical activity, and he *really* sucked at using the ODM gear.

"You have to trust yourself more," Mikasa tried to explain after he ran into a tree for the fifth time.

"I do trust myself!" he protested.

"No, you trust logic," Mikasa said, "and you get so caught up in trying to solve the problem that you run out of time and run into a tree."

"You just have to do what feels right!" Eren agreed, "follow your instinct when using the gear. Don't overthink things."

"Eren! Mikasa!" Reiner shouted from ahead of them, "Come on, keep up! Do you want Shadis to yell at you?"

"Right!" Eren shouted back, hopping off the branch. Mikasa spared a glance back at Armin, "You've got this," she followed Eren.

Armin slumped down. They always said he could do it, they always believed in him, and he always failed them. He really couldn't do anything right, could he? With a sigh, he followed the other two and hopped off the branch.

Unbeknownst to him, a pink haired man was hiding up in the branches above him, watching. He frowned. This just wouldn't do.

—

The barracks were quiet. Most of the trainees were out at dinner, leaving Armin alone in the room.

Armin was mending a hole in his shirt. He caught it on a branch today and it ripped. He stitched the thing back together with the ease of a practiced hand. He'd repaired a lot of those kinds of tears.

A hand tapped him on the shoulder.

"Got a minute?" Techno asked.

"Yeah, what do you need?" he asked.

Techno sat down beside him, the bed creaking under his weight, "I noticed you were looking a little sad lately. Is everything okay?"

"I'm fine."

"Yeah, I'm going to call bs on that one," Techno rested a hand on his shoulder, "You feel like you're a burden, don't you?"

Armin whipped around, "How did you-?"

Techno smiled, "I would have to be blind to not see it."

After a moment, Armin sighed, relenting "I don't *feel* like. I know I am."

"What makes you say that?"

"You know what makes me feel that way. Just look at my placements in the classes."

"What?" Techno asked, "Do you mean first in Titan Lectures, because there is no need to brag. It's not *my* fault I placed last."

Armin ignored the fact that it totally was Techno's fault. "I mean literally every other class, Techno. I'm always the last one to finish, the one to do the worst, the one who always drags the team down. Did you know that I've never once beat someone in hand to hand combat? I-I know I'll never be like you or Mikasa, hell, I'll never be as good as anyone, but it still hurts."

A beat passed. "Well," Techno said, "You're right about that."

"What-?"

"Yep, you got it in one kid," Techno said, "You'll never be as good as Mikasa is at fighting. You'll never be as adept at using ODM gear as I am. You'll never have the bullheaded determination that Eren does. You just won't, and that's okay. You seem to forget that while you're last place in physical aspect, you're running laps around us in terms of intelligence. You're strong in other areas."

Techno pulled something from his pocket. It was a rectangular package, covered in rough brown paper and tied together with a piece of twine, "Here."

Armin hesitantly took it, "What is it?"

Techno nudged him, "Why don't you find out?"

He looked up at Techno.

"Go on, open it."

Slowly, Armin pulled at the twine, letting the package come undone. Once he freed the string he tore through the paper, revealing the gift underneath. It was a small book with black leather bound cover. He opened to the first page, finding six words in thick black print. *Sun Tzu - The Art of War.*

"What is this?" he asked, flipping through the pages. Each page was covered in messy, handwritten scrawl. The words were written out quickly, but the care shone through in every shaky letter.

"The best book to ever exist," Techno provided.

"Why did you give it to me?"

"You're a soldier Armin," Techno explained, "You need to know that war isn't just won through pure might or size of army. It's won through smart people giving commands. Strategists, generals, commanders. The longer you fight the more you realize that the most dangerous thing in battle isn't a blade, it's the mind."

Armin trailed his fingers down a page. It read '*all warfare is based on deception*' with a doodle of a pig stabbing a squid scribbled at the bottom. "Did you write this?" He asked.

Techno laughed, "Gods no. I just copied it down. Read the damn thing so many times I could recite it."

Armin bit his lip, "Do- do you really think I can be strong?"

Techno smiled, bringing him into a side hug, "I know you will. Let your plans be dark and impenetrable as night, Armin, and when you move, fall like a thunderbolt."

—

Being a rabbit must suck. One second you're chilling, munching on some grass, and the next there's an arrow through your eye.

Techno whistled, and lowered his bow, "Nice shot."

Sasha smiled, also lowering her bow, "Thanks."

"Want to split it in half?"

Sasha's cheery demeanor dropped, "Over my dead body."

—

Shadis scribbled in his notebook.

They were nearing the end of the first year. So far, the sorry excuses for men he was presented with had shaped up into nice soldiers. They still had a long way to go, but he was confident that if they continued to improve at the same rate that the 104th training corps would be the best batch of soldiers the army ever produced.

A shadow passed over Shadis, accompanied by the screech of wires. They were taking an important test today. Kind of like a midterm, but only in the applications of titan killing. There were multiple fake titans scattered throughout the forest. The trainees were tasked with 'killing' at least three.

Shadis caught a flash of blond hair and a blur in the air before a chunk was taken out of the fake titan's nape. He put pencil to paper and scrawled out a note.

- Reiner Braun - He's strong as an ox and has a will to match. But more than anything, he has earned the trust of his comrades.

Another blond swooped down to take a chunk out of the titan. After the cut he aimed to land on a tree branch, stumbling as he did so. Shadis made another note.

- Armin Arlert - When it comes to physical strength, he doesn't measure up to soldier standards. But I hear that in the classroom lectures, he has shown extraordinary imagination.

More recruits descended from the trees all aiming for various titans.

- Annie Leonhart - The angle of approach of her slashing attack is impeccable...She carves deeply into the target. Personality-wise, she tends to be a loner and has trouble cooperating.
- Bertolt Hoover - He's mastered every single skill that's been taught...And I believe he has a lot of potential...But he lacks drive and tends to leave decisions to others.
- Jean Kirstein - He has a deep understanding of the vertical maneuvering equipment and excels at exploiting that skill...He can also take in a situation at a moment's glance, but his personality is like a drawn sword, which tends to create conflict.
- Connie Springer - He has a fine sense of balance and is effective at vertical maneuvering. However, he has got a slow mind and often makes strategic mistakes.

Sasha let out a whoop of excitement as she sliced through a nape, flinging herself around with the ODM gear wildly. She was grinning the entire time.

- Sasha Blouse - She moves quickly and has remarkable instincts...But she has issues with structure, making her ill-suited for organized activity.

Two slices suddenly appeared in the nape accompanied by nothing more than a blur of black and red.

- Mikasa Ackerman - She has mastered every single difficult subject perfectly. Her talent is historically unprecedented, making her the most valuable of them all.

Another recruit flew by, making a shallow cut into a nape. It wouldn't be anywhere deep enough to kill. He circled back and made the one of the proper depth.

- Eren Jaeger - Though proficient at barehanded fighting, he doesn't seem to have any other skills...But he possesses a sense of purpose that's twice as strong as anyone else's. Through constant effort, his grades have improved steadily.

A streak of pink and the flash of blades were the only warning before slice after slice was put into the artificial napes. The movement was as brief and violent as lightning, striking quick and deadly. Not a single 'titan' was left alive.

"Techno, stop hogging all the kills!" Eren shouted.

"Yeah!" Connie laughed, "Save some for the rest of it."

The man landed on a tree branch, pink hair swaying gently in the wind, red eyes sharp as the blades he wielded. Shadis' hazel met his challenging crimson. His hand tightened around his pencil.

- Technoblade. A beast in the form of a man.

—

If asked, Erwin would say he was a calm man. You needed to be as a scout commander. Failing to keep a cool head could cost you more than a few lives outside the walls. It was imperative to stay calm even as everything came crashing down around you.

Erwin flipped through the pages of Shadis' report. It was the usual stuff, if not a bit better than most years. He saw a note about some recruits wanting to join the scouts. That was always good.

He skimmed quickly over the personal notes. Reiner, big brother type. Armin, weak, smart. Annie, Bertolt, Jean, Connie, Sasha. Oh, Mikasa looked promising. He would have to try and nab her for the scouts. Eren, he seemed like the brave type. Erwin could probably use that to get him to join.

He continued to skip through the list. Blah, blah, blah. Recruit showing promise, recruit not showing promise. It was the usual stuff-

He came to a full stop, eyes lingering on one particular name. Technoblade. The name of a dead man.

Erwin would say he was a calm man, but to say he didn't curse multiple times and damn near fall out of his chair would be a lie.

—

The officer quarters at basic training were fairly nice, if modest. Each officer was supplied with a bedroom, dining room and kitchenette. The rooms were built from sturdy wood, worn from the years of use. The windows were yellowing and the floor creaked when you walked, but they were nice. They weren't exactly lavish but were miles ahead of the barracks the trainees stayed in.

"Thank you for meeting with me on such short notice, Shadis," Erwin said.

"It was no trouble Commander Erwin," Shadis replied, walking over to the dining table, "Please, take a seat."

He did, "Thank you, and no need for formalities. I served under you for years. It feels wrong."

Shadis blinked, "Arlight. If you're not here for some bureaucratic bullshit or to exchange a few nice words, what the fuck do you want?"

Erwin smiled, "That's more like it," he placed a group of papers on the table, "Do you know what these are?"

Shadis flipped through them, "The standard trainee report." he answered, "I wrote them last week. What exactly is the problem?"

"There was a particular trainee I was interested in."

"Yeah, there's always a few you try to steal for the scouts. Who the fuck is it this time? That Jaeger kid is eager to join."

"I'm not here about Jaeger," Erwin dismissed, "I'm here for another." he picked a page out of the mess, "Technoblade, no last name," he raised an eyebrow, "I wasn't aware you were a fan of jokes."

Shadis frowned, "Do you see me laughing? Cut to the chase Erwin."

"I suppose I'm just curious why your report included the name of a dead man."

"I don't follow."

"Have you heard about the Angel of Shiganshina?" Erwin asked.

Shadis scoffed, "Sure. Who hasn't. Some silly folk tale, caused by mass hysteria. He's a myth, a story concocted in the minds of terrified people, desperate for a savior."

"Oh, let me assure you, he's very real. Have you heard of his physical description?"

"No." Shadis said, "I'm not a fan of stories."

"Let me tell you then," Erwin said, leaning forward, "Pink hair, pale skin, red eyes."

Shadis looked down at him, unconvinced, "Are you *seriously* insinuating that Cadet Blade is some sort of folk hero?"

"No," Erwin replied, "He's so much more than that. You're familiar with the report regarding Captain Levi's survival, correct?"

Shadis snorted, "Who isn't? I don't think there's an officer in the military who hasn't read the damn thing. Three sentences long, with one being the title. *'Captain Levi's Survival in Titan Territory. Captain Levi spent three months in titan territory. He was able to return to the walls with minimal injury.'* It's a legend for being the worst report in the military."

"Do you know why it's so brief?"

"Knowing the Scout budget, you probably ran out of ink and didn't have the funds to get more."

"No. It's because it's all confidential. The only people who know about the true story are me, Hange, and Levi himself."

"Enlighten me then."

"Captain Levi didn't survive alone," Erwin explained, "Someone helped him get back to the walls, but was later confirmed dead at Shiganshina. He had pink hair, red eyes, and the same name as the Cadet on that list. Technoblade is a dead man, and yet, he is actively attending basic training."

Shadis for the first time was speechless.

"Describe Cadet Blade for me," Erwin asked.

"Pink hair, pale skin, red eyes," Shadis cursed, "Are you sure it's your guy?"

Erwin thought about it, "There's only one person who could know for sure."

—

A knock came at his door.

It was midnight, the moon high in the sky. Levi opened his eyes without resistance. Sleep didn't come easily for him these days. It hadn't for a long time. He threw off the covers and slid out of bed, scowl fixed on his face. He was *just* getting tired and thought he would actually get some rest tonight, then some douchebag decided to wake him up.

He opened the door, squinting in the harsh lamplight of the hallway.

"It's fucking midnight, Erwin," he grumbled, looking up the the man. The man who, by the way, did not look guilty in the slightest for disturbing him.

"I know," Erwin said, "But this is urgent."

Levi pinched the bridge of his nose, "I swear to Godesses if this is about the ink budget again. I've told you fifty fucking times that we don't have the money for any more."

"It's not about the ink budget Levi."

"Then what the fuck did you wake me up for?"

Erwin shifted, actually looking a bit uncomfortable. Weird.

"Levi, we need to talk about Technoblade."

Levi scowled, "I've already told you everything about him. He was crazy. A lunatic. Deranged!" Levi sighed, "You know what? This discussion is over. I've told you so many times not to bring him up again. What do you do? Keep asking about him. I'm not willing to keep doing this-"

"Levi please."

"No!" he interrupted, "Listen to me! I'm not going to talk about this. If you keep pushing the subject I will punch you in the fucking face!"

"It's really important-"

"What's important is the fact you never listen to me!" Levi backed into his room, hand gripping the door, "You have no right to keep bringing Techno up. You don't get to talk about him, alright? He's dead. Show some fucking respect instead of trying to pick my brain about him."

"I need you to listen!"

"No," he started shutting the door, "Goodnight Erwi-"

"He's alive!" Erwin shouted.

Levi pushed open the door, "What did you just say?"

"I said he's alive." Erwin repeated.

Levi growled, "You know, you've done some shitty things before, but pretending that he's alive to get more info out of me is a new low. You can't just let it lie can you?"

"I'm not lying Levi," Erwin said, "He's alive. There's a man in the 104th training corps with the exact name, appearance, and skill as the Technoblade you've described."

"But that's impossible! I saw him die. It happened right in front of me. . . ." he trailed off, looking back up at Erwin, "How sure are you?"

"Almost 100% It's too many similarities for it to be coincidence, but we need you to confirm it."

Levi took a couple deep breaths, "Alright. I'll go check this out. But Erwin?"

"Yes."

Levi glared at him, eyes burning with a cold sort of anger, "If I find out you lied about this, I'll make you wish you never even *thought* about trying this."

—

It took a day to get from the Scout HQ to basic training. Every second of the trip felt like hours to Levi. Usually they went by carriage, but Levi just saddled his horse and rode out. He didn't wait until morning to depart, far too anxious to do that. The moon urged him on forward, her light kind against his back.

Levi never let himself dream that Techno could be alive. He couldn't delude himself like that, couldn't give himself that false hope. He wasn't weak enough to succumb to it. He wasn't strong enough to survive it.

Day broke across the horizon, causing the moon to shy away.

With her support gone, the only thing driving Levi forward was the slight chance that Techno might *actually* be alive.

"Come on girl," he urged his horse forward, "You've got this."

It was a dangerous thing to dream, even more dangerous to hope. It was why Levi tried to chase away the memory of Techno. It hurt to dream of him, hearing his laughter in his sleep. The memory of Techno's smile could cut more than any knife could. The hope to see it again would kill him. So he never dreamed, he never hoped.

But now, racing across the open fields, filled with nothing but those razor sharp memories, Levi broke. For the first time in three years, he let himself hope.

—

Techno yawned. Today was a rough one. There was a full day class of Titan Lectures. He's honestly surprised he survived it.

He grabbed a bowl of food. It was soup today.

He muttered a quick, "Thank you" to the cooks and went to go find the Chaos Trio. Maybe today wasn't so bad afterall.

—

Levi reached Basic Training at sunset. He practically threw himself off his horse, patting her neck and saying a sincere, "Thank you." before running off.

It was getting late so the recruits probably weren't still training, but it was too early for them to be in the barracks. That left one place. The mess hall.

Levi raced through the training fields, anticipation and fear growing with each step. His heart beat rapidly in his chest, slamming against ribs almost painfully. What if Techno wasn't really alive? It was a terrifying thought. Oh, Goddesses, what if he was?! Levi didn't know which would crush him more.

He rounded a corner and spotted a large building. Warm light was shining from the windows and even from far away he could hear the noise coming from the building. Bingo.

—

Techno sat down, digging into his food. Eren and Armin were laughing about something having already finished their food, while Mikasa was nibbling slowly at her last chunk of bread.

"Are you three are sure you're eating enough?" Techno asked the trio, "You know they don't give very big portions here. Here have some of mine."

Techno slapped Sasha's encroaching hand away from his food, "Not you."

"Aw," Shasha whied, "You *always* give them food!"

"Because I know they won't eat my entire portion, unlike *some people,*" His words were harsh, but his tone was light, a smile fixed on his face.

Yeah, today was a good day.

—

Levi burst into the dinning hall. He pushed his way through the dense crowd of recruits. He got a few, 'hey watch where you're going!'s and 'hey's but he wasn't really in the mood to care. He was practically throwing people out of his way, head whipping around wilding, desperate for a glimpse of pink hair or red eyes.

Where was he?

Where was he?!

Whispers followed behind him.

"Holy shit! Is that Captain Levi?!"

"What's he doing here?"

"Oh my goddesses, it's humanities strongest! No seriously, look!"

The crowd started to part in front of him, the cadets staring at him with wide eyed expressions. It was a mixture of awe and shock, but Levi couldn't really find it in himself to give a shit.

—

"Sasha, stop trying to steal my food!" Techno shouted, pushing her away.

"Never!" she shouted back.

"You freaking traitor!"

—

"You freaking traitor!"

Levi knew that voice. It was a voice he thought he would never hear again. He turned sharply and practically ran towards the sound.

Please be real. Please be real. Please be real.

He threw a guy out of his way. His mind was so fixated on one thing that it couldn't think of anything else. Tunnel vision to find that voice again. To find that man again.

Please be real. Please be real. Please be real.

He broke out into a run, unable to contain himself anymore. The last of his inhabitants fell away as he sprinted through the hall. His heart was a bird, wings flapping and slamming against its cage, begging to be freed.

Please be real. Please be real. Please be real.

The crowd in front of him gave way, revealing a large table with a couple recruits eating their dinner at it. They were chatting excitedly, shouting and smiling. Most of them were children, maybe thirteen or fourteen at most. In the middle of the table, pointedly ignoring the chaos around him, was a familiar man.

Levi stopped dead in his tracts, his heart skipping a beat.

Oh Goddesses, it was real.

Techno looked the same as he had all those years ago. Same sharp face, crimson eyes, and calm demeanor. His hair was different though, cut just above his shoulders. For some reason, that struck Levi the hardest. This wasn't just some figment of his imagination. It wasn't just something his mind pieced together from memories and dreams. This was real, changed and different, but the same as he remembered.

Techno was alive.

—

"Oh holy shit," Eren said.

Armin looked up from his food, eyes widening comically, "holy shit indeed," he whispered.

"Language," Techno muttered through a mouthful of soup. He was surprised how loud his voice sounded. Usually he couldn't hear himself think over the sound of the mess hall. It was then that the silence became apparent.

No one was talking. Not a single soul. It was so deathly silent you could hear a pin drop.

Techno looked up, eyes scanning the room questioningly. The entire 104th was quiet, shock plastered on their faces. *What on Earth-*

His mind came to a screeching halt as his eyes landed on someone standing in the middle of the room. He could never forget that face.

The spoon he was holding slipped from his hand, falling to the table with a clatter. He rose from his seat, face slack with shock.

"Levi?" he breathed.

For a moment, the world froze. The rest of the hall fell away, disappearing into a hazy background. For that single moment, the only people in the world were Levi and Techno. The only thing that mattered was each other. Two lost things, reunited, captured in the icy frame of a heartbeat.

 Then, the next second came. The noise, the people, the world. It came in a rush of blood in his ears and a pulse in his chest. It came in the moment of a friend walking up to him. It came in eyes he had not met in three years. It came in a man he hadn't seen in years, now standing in front of him.

Techno opened his mouth, trying to find something to say, "W-Why are you h-"

Levi punched him. Just a quick, powerful motion and a crack of pain.

Metal exploded in Techno's mouth, sweet and bright on his tongue. he brought a hand to his cheek, "Yeah, I suppose I deserve that."

"You're alive?!" Levi exclaimed.

Techno smiled awkwardly, "Came as a surprise for me too."

"I saw you die," Levi hissed.

Techno nodded weakly, "You did."

"You were bit in half!"

"I was."

"How can you be so calm about this?!" Levi exploded, "How- How can you just stand there and be so *nonchalant* about this! I watched you die!" he looked him in the eye, " *I mourned you!"*

"Levi-"

"No!" He shouted, "Three years, Techno! I thought you were dead for three years! I spent every day just *wishing* that there was some way you could be alive. That you could still be standing beside me. All I had left of you was a wooden carving, a coat, and a constellation. I thought those were the only things in the *world* left of you. Only for it to turn out you've been alive this whole time!"

Levi's hands pushed through his hair roughly, disbelief written across his face, "This whole time you were alive. This whole goddess damn time."

Techno looked away, "Yes."

"You died, Techno! You left me for three years, all alone, thinking you were dead," he clutched a hand to his chest, "What? You survived just to leave me anyway? Is that why you never tried to find me? You know, I thought that I had finally, *finally* found someone who wouldn't leave me behind. Then you got yourself killed," He laughed cruelly, "Or apparently not. Seeing as you're right here in front of me! Oh Goddess, maybe I've finally lost my mind. Maybe you really are dead and this is just some fantasy I've concocted-"

Techno yanked him into a hug.

"Listen," he said.

Levi opened his mouth to protest, only to be cut off.

Ba-bum, ba-bum, ba-bum. Steady and solid, the rhythmic tapping inside the chest: a heartbeat.

"I'm not dead Levi," Techno whispered, "I'm okay."

He tried to find a snappy response, but couldn't come up with anything, "Goddess fucking damnit" he swore, "I missed you, brat."

Techno slumped down into the hug, "I missed you too, Peregrine."

And oh, if that didn't bring tears to his eyes. Stupid. Stupid, stupid, *stupid.* It was just a name, but it was something he hadn't heard in years. Something he thought was dead and gone.

Levi let himself get lost in the embrace. It was exactly as he remembered. Warm and soft, but solid. He was wrapped up in a gentle set of arms, pulling him close to Techno's chest. Warm, so warm. Techno's chest rose and fell steadily, soft breaths accompanying the motion. If Levi listened closely, he could hear the heartbeat beneath it all. *Ba-bum, ba-bum, ba-bum.*

He was alive. Goddesses, he was alive. Right there, living and breathing. Heart beating. Techno was alive.

He buried himself into the fabric of Techno's shirt, and let the tears fall.

He didn't know how long they stayed like that, caught up in their own little world. Techno rubbing his hands soothingly down the shorter man's back while Levi cried silently into his shirt. It could have been seconds. Could have been hours. He wished it could have been days.

"I thought you died," he said finally.

"I'm sorry," Techno said, tightening the hug, "I'm so sorry."

"Why didn't you try to find me?" he asked.

Techno's hands twisted into his cape, "I didn't know where to look."

"So the military?"

"It was the only way I knew how to find the Scouts. To find you."

"Fuck," He punched weakly at Techno's chest, "Why did you wait three years? You could have found me so long ago."

"Well. . ." Techno released him. He lifted one hand to gesture at a group of cadets, keeping the other fixed firmly on Levi, as if he might vanish if he let go.

"I found something that I needed to wait for," he said, looking at Mikasa, Eren, and Armin.

Levi glared at him, "Techno did you knock up someon-"

"No!" he shouted, "Christ! No! I wouldn't do that! And they're way too old for that to be true!" he cleared his throat, "Uh, Levi. Meet Mikasa, Eren, and Armin-"

"What the actual fuck." Eren interrupted.

"Language."

"You actually know Captain Levi?!" Eren shouted, "What the fuck Techno. What the fuck!"

"Holy shit you weren't lying," Armin whispered, *"Oh my Goddess."*

Mikasa just narrowed her eyes at Levi. She hadn't gotten over the fact that he'd punched Techno. No one hurt her family, especially not some shorty with an attitude problem.

"Guys please," Techno tried weakly.

"How in the FUCK do you know him?!" Eren demanded, "What the fuck is going on! Why are you two acting like- like long lost brothers?!"

The room exploded into chaos.

"You know Captain Levi?"

"Oh my Goddess, that's who he wanted to find!"

"Holy shit, holy shit, holy shit."

"This is so fucking weird!"

"Wait, how did you meet!"

"What do you mean you died!"

"Bitten in half. You were *bitten in half?!*"

"That's Captain Levi. My Goddesses, that's actually Captain Levi!"

"Everyone shut up!" Techno shouted, silencing the room. He sighed, "Yes I know Levi." he turned to Armin and Eren, "I've literally told you this before."

Armin shuffled awkwardly, "We kind of just thought that. . ."

"Thought what?"

Armin coughed, "That you made it up to control Eren."

Techno blinked, "Are you serious?"

"Well," Armin said awkwardly, "he was an unruly kid. Still is. Would of made sense to use his hero worship against him. It's a common parenting technique."

"Are you kidding me? You thought I made it all up just to what? Gain leverage over Eren?"

"Well, yeah. It worked, didn't it?"

Eren gaped, "hey!"

"Eren you know it's true."

"Is not."

"Is too."

"Is not."

"Is too."

"Is not!"

A laugh cut through the arguing. It was quiet and low at first, but grew in intensity and sound. Levi doubled over, bracing himself against his knees as laughter wracked through him violently.

He snapped up to face Techno, "Techno what the fuck?"

"I-"

"No, what the actual fuck! You've spent three years playing fucking *nanny?* " he hissed, "You think that this is some joke? You think that three years is nothing?" he scoffed, "Of course you would, you big, immortal, asshole!"

"Good to have you back too, Levi."

"Yeah yeah. I'm glad you're not dead and shit. Speaking of-"

Levi grabbed the lapels of Techno's shirt and tugged him down to eye level, "How. the. fuck. are. you. alive?" he demanded, enunciating each word heavily. His expression suddenly softened, eyes searching and eyebrows pinched, "What *happened,* Techno?

"I-" Techno struggled to find the words, "I don't even know myself."

Techno rested his hands on Levi's, eye's sad. He frowned, meeting Levi's eyes. Crimson against gun-metal gray. For a moment blood red flickered into black before returning to the way they were.

Levi couldn't see it. No one but Techno could, but a figure was looming over the captain. They were dark and deadly, dreamlike and misty in form. Long pink hair cascaded over their shoulders and a sharp smile was spread lazily across their lips. A pair of midnight eyes bored into him.

Techno met their gaze, then looked back down to Levi, "We have a lot to talk about."

Chapter End Notes

Fuck this. 22k. I said 8. I said FUCKING 8!

For real tho, would you guys prefer longer chapters slower update or shorter chapters with more frequent updates?

UHJGJHFJHFGJKGKGjh I'm so fucking tired. Also, thanks to my comment buddy and all your comments. I use some of the shit you write in the story :) is that plagiarism? Eh, I don't care. Shouldn't of commented it if you didn't want me to see it. (JK PLEASE KEEP COMMENTING SHIT! IT IS MY ONLY MOTIVATION!!!!)

Oh, should I make a social media account for this fic. I post this anonymously bc my friend discovered my Ao3 account and I do NOT want them to know I spend my time doing this. Idk.

Also! I have come to realize that I'm pretty much the only person writing this shit. (I mean, fair. Why would anyone write this.) but PLEASE i need content ;-;. If y'all know any good fics like this TELL ME. Or create something. I need company. This is a lonely corner of Ao3. *sigh* one day Techno meets Attack on Titan will become the next big thing. Mark my words.

Anyways. Yeah

See ya next time.

OH YEAH [Here's some art](#) Its from chapter 3 I think??? Tell me if you want me to stop with the art lol. The Levi one was just a quick sketch. All of them are really.

Okay bye.

Explanations. Expectations.

Chapter Summary

Techno and Levi have a much needed talk. Chaos trio finally finds out what the fuck is going on. Shadis would like to unsubscribe from life. Oluo is a bitch.

Chapter Notes

Mind you, this chapter takes place over like two days at most. In comparison to last chapter and chapter 5 which collectively took three years.

Techno took a deep breath.

The tack shed was dark and dirty. It was a large room, but was so crammed with gear and provisions that there was scarcely room to move. Liquid moonlight dripped through the windows, flowing like silver ink across the floor. As if some clumsy god knocked over their pot of ink when drawing the stars.

Techno held the breath. It nestled between his ribs, anxious and heavy. He didn't want to let it out. Techno wanted to hold it to his chest until his vision darkened and his consciousness fled. It was so much easier to let it all slip away than deal with the mess he'd made.

The room was dirty too. So dusty from years of neglected upkeep. Dust drifted through the air, the moonlight setting it aflame. It was bright as burning ash, dancing down to the floor. Falling like snow on a crisp winter day. He knew it wasn't the most ideal place for this conversation, but there was nowhere else to go where prying eyes wouldn't find them.

Techno looked at the other person in the room.

Levi was frowning. His expression was unreadable, so many things fit into a single crease of lips and a pinch in his brows. It was anger, it was sadness, grief, terror, worry and something that was

just indesribably *Levi*. It was so human, so inexplicable and complex and impossible. How so many things could be contained in one person would forever escape Techno.

Okay. It was time to do this.

Release. Soft breath into night, warm on his lips as it fled from his lungs.

Techno closed his eyes, and let himself breathe again.

"So," he said carefully, "I'm sure you're wondering how I'm not, uh, dead."

Levi raised a brow, "No shit. People don't exactly come back from the dead that often."

He laughed awkwardly, looking down at his hands. For a moment, he remembered the gray smile of a brother and a hollow voice, happy and empty. He remembered bitterly cold snow and hands stained blue with bleeding cobalt pigment. He looked back up at Levi with a weak smile, "Yeah. I've been wondering how I did that myself."

He sighed, a shaky thing.

"In my world," he said slowly, "we had healing items. Not just medicine, but real *healing*. There were potions, foods, beacons, totems" his mouth twisted into a scowl at the word, but he continued, "one of the most common types were golden apples. They were easy to make. You gilded an apple and imbued it with a bit of magic and it just. . . *worked.*"

"So what?" Levi asked, "You'd just eat one and your wounds would go away?"

Techno nodded, "Your flesh would stitch up right before your eyes."

Levi's eyes went wide. It was incredible. Magic, real magic that could just- no. He needed to focus, "So a golden apple saved you?"

Techno's hands shook, "No. Not even a golden apple could've saved me then. Only a totem or an enchanted apple could have saved me then. None of which I had and neither of which are craftable."

"Enchanted apple?"

"They're like golden apples but a million times more effective. It's for the same reason they're not craftable. While a golden apple is made with a simple touch of magic, enchanted apples are made with the will of a god. And," he took a breath, meeting Levi's eyes, "They're ultimately what saved me."

"I thought you didn't have any?"

"I didn't," Techno said, "And that's the killer isn't it? I had the gold, I had the apple, but I didn't have the last ingredient. I shouldn't be standing here right now, but somehow, I am. It should have been impossible. Not without all three things. So how on earth was the third present?"

Levi frowned, "You're not really saying-"

"I don't know what I'm saying!" Techno snapped, "Gods, I don't even know what I'm *thinking* half the time! I feel like my mind's being pulled in so many different different directions I don't know which way is up or down! Everything is a question and *nothing* is an answer! Every time I try to make sense of any of it all I get is more mysteries!"

Techno heaved, breath coming in sharp intakes and shaky exhales. Hands buried themselves in his hair, gripping tightly to his skull, as if trying to keep it from breaking apart. His eyes eclipsed into night, irises glowing bright in the dark of the room.

It didn't take a genius to figure out something was wrong.

"Then don't give me an answer," Levi said, gently "Give me a theory. Give me an idea. Hell, give me a question. Give me a place to start so I can help you."

"I'm beyond help Levi," Techno whispered, "I've been for thousands of years. Longer. Heh, sometimes there are days I wonder if there was ever anything to save in the first place."

"That is for you to think, and for me to disprove," Levi laid a hand on his back, "Because I'm looking at you, and I see a whole lot worth saving."

Techno chuckled low, "You're delusional."

"That would make one of us."

Techno looked up, "Levi-"

"You're not crazy, Techno," Levi affirmed, "I don't care what other people think, or even what *you* think. You're not crazy. Whatever's going on, it's real. It's real to you, and that means it's real to me. Got that?"

Techno's hands fell away from his head, and his shoulders slumped down, eyes downcast to the floor, "I wouldn't even know where to start."

"The beginning is good a place as any."

"The beginning," Techno repeated. A beat passed, time slow and languid. Techno sighed, a crooked smile on his face, "That's what people always try to find out, but never can. Do you remember Uranus and Gaia?"

Levi nodded, thinking back to stories told over a campfire, and of the words they had whispered to each other in the hollow of a tree.

Techno continued, "Creation myths are a dire attempt to explain the world around us. Make everything just a little less scary. To take everything that's a question and give it an answer." he

laughed, "I suppose that's rather fitting. And, I guess it makes sense that this starts at the same place as those myths."

Techno looked at the moon through the window, "Gods." he said softly, "So powerful, so cruel, so mysterious to all of man. They create, they destroy, and they've long forsaken us. Only the will of a god can make enchanted apples and *somehow,* I made one."

"Me!" he exclaimed, "Sorry old Technoblade. Just a man, made one. Not even a good man. A pitiful, weary, *fucked up* man made one. A man who can't even even control himself when he sleeps, who hears the whispers of thousands in his ears, who blacks out and wakes up covered in blood. That man! That man made one! A gift from the gods fell in his hands. The hands of a man who sees a stranger in the mirror instead of himself."

Techno's eyes were black as the satin night, "How did I manage that? How did I do something so impossible? The more I ask the more I wonder the more I realize that maybe," his voice was one of dissonant whispers, of voices bleeding from shadows and stars shouting their secrets, "It wasn't me."

Levi gripped his shoulder, "You think. . ."

Techno nodded, "There's- There's something in me Levi. I don't know what it is. I don't know what it wants, or where it came from or how long it's been there but I know something's there. I-It talks to me. In my dreams, in my reflection, in my own voice."

He looked to Levi, eyes searching for an answer he knew wasn't there, "and I can't help but ask, who is it? And more," midnight eyes burned with irises as bright as sun, ***"Who am I?"***

—

Eren glanced around the room. It was quiet, no one daring to speak or even move. Techno and Levi - and what the fuck, that was *Captain Levi* - had left only moments before, leaving the rest of the cadets in a state of dumfounded stupor.

"So," Eren said slowly, "Is no one going to talk about what just happened?"

"What the actual fuck," Armin said, smartly, finally snapping out of his shocked state.

The world finally seemed to unfreeze, the rest of the cadets beginning to talk and shout again lively. Soon the roar of the mess hall was back in full force, the cacophony of voices like the sound of april rain pounding a windowsill.

"I'm going to kill that shorty," Mikasa muttered darkly.

"What?!" Eren exclaimed "You can't do that! He's Captain Levi!"

"He punched Techno," Mikasa defended.

"Did you not hear me? He's *Captain Levi.*"

"Speaking of," Armin cut in, "How does Techno know him?"

"They clearly knew each other from a long time ago," Eren agreed, "The Captain had said it was three years since he last saw him. Since he thought Techno. . . died?"

Mikasa frowned, "He said Techno was bit in half."

"That couldn't be it," Eren said, "Technoblade said he was born in Trost. He would have never even seen a titan!"

"Three years," Armin realized, "That's when the fall was."

Mikasa narrowed her eyes, "You think he was there?"

"No," Armin said, "I know he was."

"What do you mean?"

"I never told anyone because Techno never wanted anyone to know," Armin rubbed his arm, "But he was there that day. I don't know why or how, but he saved me and Grandad. You've heard about the Angel of Shiganshina right? Well, it's not a myth. Uh, that was him."

Eren blanched, "You're kidding."

Armin shook his head, "I was there, Eren. I know what I saw."

Eren slapped his forehead, "How could we have been so blind? Their appearances are the same. How many people out there have pink hair?"

"But the shorty said he died," Mikasa pointed out, "and clearly, he did not."

Armin furrowed his brow, "When I met him," his words were slow, careful, as if he was piecing everything together as he talked, "he was covered in blood, and his clothes were shredded. I could see deep cuts in his flesh too. Like something had ripped through it. It's possible that maybe, he *was* bit in half."

"Why did you never tell us?" Eren demanded.

"Techno didn't want me to tell you."

"Why?"

"Because," he hesitated, "because the first time I met him, he tried to kill me."

Eren bristled, *"What?"*

"He was out of it," Armin explained, "You know when he has an episode. His eyes go black and he becomes violent, like he's not himself anymore."

"And he hurt you?"

"No!" Armin exclaimed, "He stopped himself."

"But he wanted to!" Eren grabbed Armin's shoulders, "Oh goddess, he could have *killed* you!"

"It's not his fault. You know he can't control it!"

"Why are you defending him?! He tried to kill you!"

"He saved me!" Armin looked at them, then said, "he saved all of us."

Eren for once, was silent.

"You remember, don't you?" Armin asked, "The hunger. The emptiness clawing at your stomach, the fatigue and lethargy, how you would tighten your belt just so you could feel something besides the pain in your belly."

Armin scowled, "Techno fed us when no one would. Techno helped us when we couldn't help ourselves. He stayed with us when we had no one left. I don't care if he's dangerous, I don't care if he's a monster, and I don't care what either of you think because he was far kinder to us than anyone else was. He's family, Eren. Family supports each other. It's only right we return the favor."

After a while, Mikasa nodded, "Techno may have some. . . *problems,* but that does not change the fact that he loves us. And, it does not change the fact that we love him."

"And if he snaps?" Eren challenged, "What if he actually *does* end up hurting you someday? Then what?"

Armin crossed his arms, "Why can't you let this go?"

"Techno is family," Eren agreed, "But you two come first. I will always put you before him, and if he's a danger to you I can't let that go. I love Techno too, but I cannot ignore the fact that he's dangerous to you."

"So what? You would just ignore his kindness because you're afraid?"

"Yes," Eren said grimly, "And I would do it a thousand times to protect you two."

"We don't need protection. Stop fighting some imaginary monster. Techno wouldn't harm us."

"Techno's unstable on the best of days, Armin!" Eren snapped, "For heaven's sake, he thought he was bit in half when he, clearly, was not."

"Don't talk about him like that."

"Armin, you've seen him lose it. We all have."

"He's not crazy!" Armin hissed, "He's hurting maybe, scared yes, battered, bruised or whatever you call it, but he. Is. Not. Crazy."

"Then how the hell is he alive then, huh? If any of the things he said actually happened he wouldn't be." Eren challenged, "How is he not dead if that's the case?"

Armin scowled. His mind was one of calculations and systematic solving. He worked with facts and knowledge to find an answer. He knew, deep down, that Techno wasn't lying. Innately, he did, but he didn't know how. To know an answer but not the solution was frustrating. He knew what was true, he did, he just didn't know how to prove it. For once, he couldn't find the logic.

"He's immortal," Mikasa realized eventually.

"What?" Eren asked.

"The shorty called him immortal." Mikasa explained, "Maybe he didn't die because he can't."

"That's impossible," Armin denied.

"I hate to agree," Eren said, "But how would that even be possible? That's just not something that can happen. People don't just not die, right?"

He was met with silence.

"Right?"

Armin sighed, taking a seat, "Nothing makes sense Eren. I have no clue what's going on, and I doubt anyone does." he frowned, "All I know is someone owes us some goddess damn answers."

—

Techno rested his head on Levi's shoulder.

"This is a real mess, isn't it," He said.

Levi chuckled, "When is life anything but?"

Techno hummed, "I'm sorry."

"I know."

"But that doesn't make it right, does it?" Techno dismissed, "I hurt you. Even if it was unintentional, I let you believe I was dead for three years. That can't be ignored. I'm sorry."

Levi leaned into his side, "It was kind of a dick move."

"Understatement of the century."

"I don't know whether to feel angry or relieved that you're alive," Levi admitted.

Techno shrugged, "Why not both?"

"Seems a bit contradictory, no?"

"What's wrong with a bit of dichotomy?"

Levi huffed, "I hate you."

"You love me."

"I know."

Techno smiled sadly, "I'm sorry." he repeated after a moment.

Levi sighed, "No, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have yelled at you."

"And punched me?"

"Oh no, you fully deserved that."

Techno shrugged, "Can't argue with that." he cast his gaze downward, "I don't suppose you could ever forgive me."

 "Idiot," Levi said, "The only thing I ever blamed you for was dying on me. I forgave the moment I found out you were alive."

—

Two figures crept through the dim light of the bunkhouse, forms hidden in thick drapes of shadow. They would have been hard to notice, if not for a sharp eye and keen ear. Their footfalls were nearly silent, softened from years of experience. Indeed, the only thing that could alert you to their presence was the quiet whispers passed between the two.

"Don't you have, like, an officer's quarters to sleep in or something?"

"I don't live here."

"Yeah, well I gathered as much. Can't you just sleep wherever it is you *do* live?"

"Scout HQ is a day away."

"Christ."

"Yeah."

"Well, uh, there's a few empty bunks by mine."

"Why?"

"People don't like to sleep near me, given the whole murder dreams thing."

"Ah, got it-"

A match suddenly struck to life, then was dropped into an awaiting oil lamp. The light flooded the room full of sleeping cadets, revealing not the initial two people, but five. Three young trainees sat on a bed, staring intently at the two men.

Techno froze, "Okay so I know this isn't the best look-"

Eren cut him off, "You've got a lot of explaining to do, old man."

"Heh," Levi said, voice perfectly flat, "he called you old."

Techno glared at him, "I *am* old."

"Don't ignore me!" Eren hissed.

Levi scowled down at Eren, "Watch your tongue, you pint sized brat."

"Levi," Techno warned, "Be nice."

"Yeah, yeah," Levi dismissed, "He's your kid or whatever. I'm still his superior officer. Hey, I guess I'm technically yours too."

"Sure, tell yourself that."

"Don't you mean 'tell yourself that, *Sir'?*"

"Gods, I forgot how annoying you were."

"Rich, coming from you."

"Would you two stop arguing!" Armin interrupted.

Levi glared at him, but didn't say anything.

Armin pinned Techno with a sharp look, "Don't you have anything to say?"

Techno shifted from foot to foot, "Uh, sorry?"

"Really, that's what you came up with?"

Techno sighed, relenting, "What do you want to know?"

Armin stood up, the top of his head only coming up to Techno's chest. Whatever intimidating effect he was going for promptly fell flat.

"Everything, Techno" he said.

"That's a lot," Techno said arily, "You might want to be more specific."

Armin huffed, "Fine. How are you alive? Were you really bitten in half?"

"Okay first one is a whole bag of mind-hecks that we can't really get into, but it basically boils down to I don't know. All I can say is that it has something to do with my, uh, episodes. The second answer is yes."

"How could you be alive if you were bitten in half?" Armin asked.

"Like I said. I really don't know."

"Did it actually happen then?" Eren asked, "Maybe your mind just tricked you into thinking you did."

Levi bristled, "Yes, it fucking happened, brat. I saw that shit."

Techno nodded, "What he said."

" *Right,* " Armin said, doubtfully.

"Hey," Techno shrugged, "You wanted answers. I'm giving them to you. It's not my fault they don't make any sense."

Armin moved on, "Next question. Techno, you're not from the walls, are you?"

Techno hesitated, "No, I'm not."

Armin's eyes widened, shouting "I knew it!" just as Eren exclaimed, "You're from outside the walls?!" Mikasa, blessedly, stayed quiet.

Techno shushed him, " *Quiet.* "

Armin flinched back, "Right, sorry."

"What do you mean you're from outside the walls?" Eren pressed, *"Humanity outside was eradicated because of the titans."*

"Um-"

"Are there really other civilizations out there?" Armin asked, "Is that why you're so strong, why your hair is pink and your eyes are red? Are those common colors where you come from? Are you even human?"

Techno didn't know how to answer that. 'Are you even human?' Techno laughed sadly in the privacy of his mind. *There are some days I wonder that myself.*

Levi scoffed, taking over before Techno had the chance to answer, "'course he's human."

"Yeah," Techno agreed tentatively, "but to the rest of those questions, I have no answer."

"What do you mean?" Eren asked, "Where are you from then?"

Now wasn't that a loaded question? In truth, Techno did not know where he was from, even in his own universe. He couldn't remember most of his early life in fact, just that it was filled with violence, blood and fear. Fear of himself, and fear of what he could do. His de facto answer when asked where he was from was 'a little slice of nowhere, you wouldn't know it'. That wouldn't really work here.

And, that wasn't really the problem either. Explaining where he was from was easy when he could just lie. Now he was faced with the herculean task of somehow explaining that he was from not only outside the walls, but an entire separate universe.

Levi laughed at Techno's misery.

"Okay," Techno said awkwardly, "You are going to need to stick with me for this. It's not going to make any sense, and it's going to be confusing, but it's the only answer that's true. Just don't interrupt."

The chaos trio nodded.

Techno took a deep breath, "Um, so, right. I'm not from this universe."

"What?!" three voices came back at him.

Techno sighed, dragging a hand over his face, "What did I *just* say?"

He frowned deeply, "Listen, I'm from some other place that is decidedly, not this universe. When I got here I hadn't even heard of the walls. Let alone titans. I found out about them the hard way."

Armin stared at him, unable to find the words.

"Well?" Techno crossed his arms, "There you have it. Your answer."

"Assuming this is true," Armin said slowly, "How did you get here in the first place?"

"Absolutely no clue," he responded.

"Huh," Armin said dumbly.

"Yeah, now you know how I feel."

After a moment, a quiet, curt voice cut in, "How did you and the shorty meet?"

Techno grabbed Levi by the collar of his shirt before he could strangle Mikasa.

"The fuck did you say, gloomy brat?" he tried to pull away from Techno's grip to no success.

Mikasa smiled smugly, "I asked Technoblade how you two met."

"You little-"

"We met outside the walls, while the Scouts were on an expedition. I saved him from being eaten alive," Techno answered, "Then made sure he didn't kill himself by using his ODM gear with a broken leg."

"I would have been fine." Levi protested.

"Sure, *shorty.*"

Levi elbowed him in the stomach. Techno staggered back in pain, laughing through it all.

Mikasa glowered.

"I'm fine Mikasa," Techno assured, still winded from the blow, "Levi doesn't hit *that* hard. It's like a child punching you, if I'm being honest."

Levi kicked him in the shin.

"Point in case." Techno grinned.

"Wait," Eren said, "You're telling us that you made it back to the walls through titan territory."

Techno made a sound of confirmation, "Guilty as charged."

"How the hell?" Eren looked so confused, a sentiment Techno found himself sharing very often, "How are you alive? Do you just not die or something?"

"Captain Levi called you immortal," Armin said.

"Uh," Techno pressed his lips together, "Well he's not wrong."

"Dear Goddesses," Armin sat down, "It's all true."

"So you can't die then?" Eren asked, incredulous.

"No, I can," he said, "Just not from old age."

"You're twenty eight," Eren deadpanned, "How on earth could you know that yet?"

"You see, I was using an advanced technique called lying." Techno explained.

"How old are you?" Mikasa asked.

"Way too old to be acting like a total brat all the time," Levi grumbled.

Techno cuffed him on the back of the head, "Shut. I'm about 12,000, give or take."

Armin stared at him, "you're shitting me."

"Nope."

"You seriously expect us to believe that?" Eren asked, a hard edge to his tone.

"No," Techno said, "and why should you? What I'm asking is for you to have faith in me. Don't believe the crap I say, don't believe the impossible, don't believe that it could be true, but believe in me. Believe I'm not crazy."

"Armin told us you tried to kill him," Eren said.

"Eren!" Armin chastised.

Eren pressed forward, "In Shiganshina. He said you were out of it. Is that true?"

Techno looked away.

"So it is. You really tried to kill him."

"Yes," he admitted, "I was dazed, and not super conscious, but I lost control. I was a second away from killing him. It's true."

Eren tried to keep his face impassive, but his eyes were hard and burning with an emotion Techno couldn't quite place. He shifted his stance ever so slightly, so that he was just a little bit more in front of Armin and Mikasa. Like he was shielding them, Techno realized. Shielding them from Techno.

It hurt more than he would like to admit. Sending a dull pain through his chest, an ache deep below his ribcage right where his heart was.

"I'm sorry," he whispered. He glanced at Armin, finding sad blue eyes staring back at him. They were full of sorrow, uncertainty, and despair, but not a hint of fear. Not a hint of blame. There should have been. Techno deserved it.

"I'm sorry about it all," he continued, "I'm sorry about hiding things from you. I'm sorry I couldn't provide for you as well as I should have. I'm sorry I couldn't be what you needed me to be. I'm sorry I hurt you."

Armin stood abruptly, pushing Eren aside. He strode in confident steps right up to Techno, and threw himself into a hug. Techno had to take a step back, thrown by the force of the action.

Armin's arms tightened around him, comforting, kind.

"There's nothing to be sorry about," Armin said, "You never hurt me. You never hurt us. You *found* us, you made us a family."

Family. A simple six letter word that Techno knew he would never have again. He didn't remember his first family. Couldn't remember his father or mother, couldn't remember if he had siblings, if he was an older brother once, or perhaps a younger one. The last family he had, the only one he could remember, was long gone. That family died in the icy hell of antarctica. Broken under a silver crown.

He didn't have a family. Techno had comrades. He had allies. He even had friends. But, not family. In that regard, Techno was alone. Had been, is, and always would be. He knew that.

So why? Why was Armin saying he didn't have to be?

"Family?" he croaked.

Armin hummed, "Family."

Another pair of arms found him. Mikasa held him tight along with Armin, eyes closed, the barest hint of a smile on her lips.

A hand fell on his shoulder. Techno looked over to find Levi. He wasn't smiling, but he was there, supporting Techno. He was there.

"Eren, get in here," Mikasa grunted.

Eren stood, rooted solidly in place.

"Eren."

He didn't budge.

Armin threw a *look* over his shoulder, "Eren, family forgives."

Eren sighed, then joined the hug.

"Fine, maybe it does."

Techno has always been alone. He was alone in his first memory, afraid, confused, and covered in blood. He was alone as he survived. He was alone as his family crumbled. He was alone as time and time again he fought the monster that lived inside him.

A man with black eyes appeared before him, standing right behind Armin. **"No!"** it shrieked, **"They're lying! They'll leave you again. Just like Tommy, just like Wilbur. They'll abandon you!"**

Techno stared at the man for a moment. This thing that had isolated him his entire life, left him alone in the cold, shying away from love, from family, for the fear he would hurt them. For the fear they would leave him. And, now the monster was trying to do it again. Make him alone again.

Maybe, maybe he didn't have to be.

Maybe he wasn't.

Techno closed his eyes, tuned out the incessant screaming of the god that lived inside his head, and wrapped his arms around his kids, his family.

He wasn't alone.

—

For once, Techno did not dream of forgotten memories. He did not dream of blood or dead bodies, nor of the death and destruction he wrought. He wasn't out of control in this dream. He did not move without command, he did not kill without his own reason, he was the one in the driver's seat. It was strange, to dream and not have to be forced to kill.

He was sitting in an opulately ornate room. It was an old room, furnished from an old memory, but twisted and changed with the haze of time. The floor was clear marble, white as snow, and the walls were an intricate pattern of icy blue, ivory, lapis, and silver.

The room was decorated with lush couches, gilded tables and other finerys.

Yes, Techno recognized this room. It was one of the parlors in the Empire's palace. It had been forever since he had last seen it, though.

Techno walked across the room, dragging a gentle hand across the top of one of the sofas. It felt nothing like the rich fabric he remembered. Instead, he felt nothing but the cold fragility of the dream.

"They'll abandon you, you know."

Techno snapped his head up. On one of the couches a familiar figure laid splayed out, leaning leisurely into the fake plush. A monster, wearing Techno's skin. He was dressed in Techno's old Empire uniform. The light blue and wine red fabric falling in thick curtains, their golden embellishments shining like sunlight. A black crown was nestled into the messy pink locks of the monster's head, sharp and deadly in the cold light.

Techno knew the crown was made of netherite. He wondered if the monster knew it too.

The monster held a poppy between its fingers, twirling it slowly around.

Techno took a seat across from them, "I'm sure you'd like to think that."

Their grip tightened around the poppy, bruising the stem ever so. The monster's posture was relaxed for the most part, carefree and leisurely. It was, also, a sham. Techno had lived long enough to know when someone was acting calm. Everything the monster did was meticulous, planned, careful. This was some last ditch effort to convince Techno of something. It was an attempt to win back some ground, when Techno had decided enough was enough.

"They'll realize what you are," *They picked a petal from the poppy, letting it fall to the ground,* ***"and who would want to stick around after that?"***

"They know what I am," Techno replied.

"Please," *another petal fell to the floor,* **" You *don't even know what you are. Let alone them.*"**

"Oh? Then what exactly am I?"

"You're Technoblade. Champion of champions, Bringer of death, War incarnate," *petals gathered on the ground, like a puddle of blood. They scoffed,* ***"Not some pathetic charity case, hell bent on forsaking your true nature. You've abandoned yourself to play house, to feel like you belong."***

"I do belong," He shot back, "I'm as human as they are."

It laughed, ***"Sure. Human. Delude yourself into believing that."***

"I'm not crazy, I'm not deluded," he leaned back into his chair, "I just don't want to kill people I care about."

*The poppy was cast to the floor angrily. The monster shot to their feet, eye's ablaze, practically snarling **"And why shouldn't you? Why shouldn't you kill when you want to? When we want to? Why deny yourself? Why subject yourself to the rules of others, when we stand so clearly above them?"***

"I'm just a dude who's immortal. I'm not above anyone."

"No,"** it growled, **"You are not normal. You are not equal to them. That's a mockery of what you are. Of what I am!"

Techno cocked his head to the side, "and what would that be?"

The petals on the floor bled, their red pooling out from beneath them, soaking the floor in viscous blood. The walls soon fell, blue and white succumbing to deep red, until everything was bright as the poppies from his memory.

"You never listen, do you?"** they said, **"I am you as you are me. We were two then one then we became violence itself. Honestly, everyone had it figured out before you, from kings to measly soldiers chanting my name."

Techno knew, he did. He just didn't want to believe. He wasn't granted a choice. The monster continued it's speech

"I am death, I am destruction, I am the principle that stands above all others. Violence, war, cruelty. I am as you are."

"No," he whispered to himself

"You know what you are as well as I do."

Techno wished he would wake up. He wished this wasn't real. He knew, as fake as this world was, as much as it was a dream, as much as it was a nightmare, that it was real. The monster before him was real, and so were its words.

"My name. Your true self," *It said, reveling in his growing panic. The monster smiled with far too many teeth,* **"The Blood God."**

"Techno, wake up."

His eyes fluttered open slowly, the world coming back to him.

The first thing he registered was his face squished against the hardwood floor, the unpolished wood digging uncomfortably into his cheek. In front of him were various claw and scratch marks etched into the floor, with the occasional smear of blood accompanying them.

The second thing he noticed was his hands hurt. The skin around his nails and on the pads of his fingers was split and rubbed away, splinters sticking onto the still wet blood or stuck in the flesh itself. Well, that solved one mystery.

The final thing he noticed was the heavy weight of a person on top of him, pinning his arm behind the back and his body to the ground. What?

"Techno, you there?" the voice from earlier said again. It was familiar, quiet but rough and sharp in a way that was so familiar- *oh.*

"Levi?" He tried to look around, but his current position made it hard to do so.

"The one and only," Levi said back, "You doing alright?"

"What happened?"

"You were tossing and turning again. I see the nightmares haven't let up, have they?"

"You woke me up?" he asked.

"Yeah. Earned a nasty bruise for it too. I forgot how hard you hit when frightened."

Techno would later apologize profusely, but his mind right now was focused on the singular issue of someone helping him.

"Why would you do that?" he pressed, "You *know* what happens when you wake me up."

"Yeah? And? I'm not just going to let you suffer."

That's exactly what he was supposed to do! That's what everyone was supposed to do. It was better for him to live through a nightmare than injure someone! Armin had found that out, Mikasa and Eren learned it too, and eventually the entire 104th cadet corps learned it when he nearly killed Marco. Levi should have known it too.

"I could hurt you." he already did.

"Please, you couldn't kill me if you tried."

They both knew the lie there. Techno was dangerous, and yet Levi kept playing with fire. Like the bruise on his cheek proved, he was bound to get burned.

"Peregrine," Techno said seriously, "I don't want you waking me up anymore. It's not safe."

"No." Levi sounded almost bored, "I will keep doing whatever I damn please. You can't stop me, brat."

"Why?"

Levi huffed, "Is it so unbelievable to think I care?"

Techno was silent for a moment. Levi was right, wasn't he. Techno wasn't alone. He didn't have to be alone. It was reckless, idiodic, dangerous even, to be around Techno, let alone try to help him. Techno knew this, Levi knew this. His family knew it. Old and new. He didn't know whether to be happy or dismayed that he always found friends in the dumbest people out there.

"Thank you."

"No problem."

A beat.

"I don't mean to be rude, but could you please get off me? This is very uncomfortable."

"Oh shit yeah, sorry."

—

The day began as none in the military do, quiet and gently.

No horn sounded when Techno opened his eyes. No one else was up either. The barest hint of sunlight was filtering through the windows, illuminating the room just enough that Techno could make out the silhouettes of the sleeping cadets.

Techno rose slowly, not feeling any of the fatigue that he was so used to. He must've actually gotten some sleep after the, ehem, *altercation,* he had last night. It was strange, he had to admit, to be well rested.

Techno knocked on the bunk above his, "Levi, are you up?"

He got a hum in return.

"I need to talk to you."

After a groan and a minute of shuffling, Levi dropped off the top bunk, "Yeah?"

"I found out what that thing in my head is."

"Please don't tell me we were right."

Techno stayed silent.

Levi cursed, "You have got to be kidding me. You have a god living in your head."

"At the very least, a self proclaimed one."

"That can't be real."

"It's the only explanation."

Levi took a seat, Techno's mattress creaking beneath the added weight.

"What the fuck," he said.

"Yeah."

Levi looked at him, "And this-" he paused, muttering something that sounded like 'I can't believe I'm saying this' under his breath, "this *god* has been with you your entire life."

Techno nodded, "as far as I can tell, all twelve thousand years."

"Techno, how on earth did you not figure this out sooner?" Levi questioned, "Brat, I'm not trying to judge you, but that's an awful long time to have a literal deity living in you and be none the wiser."

"I know," he groaned, "I feel like such an idiot. In hindsight, it explains everything. I just thought I was, well, crazy for most of my life. I thought that the voices I heard were just something my brain made up. That I was the one forcing myself to kill, not some entity pulling the strings from behind. With time, I guess I just learned to ignore it."

"You were able to ignore a literal god?"

Techno offered a weak smile, "with enough practice you can ignore anything."

"Do you think that maybe it had something to do with you ending up here?" Levi asked.

Techno shrugged, "I really don't know. I never really noticed it with how used to I was to it, but ever since I ended up here, it's gotten worse."

Levi sighed, "Right, so you have a god living in your head, a god who makes you try to kill people and also might be capable of interdimensional travel. Great."

Techno fidgeted.

Levi glared at him, "Don't you dare tell me there's more."

"You remember when I would tell you stories about my own world?"

"Of course."

"Uh, do you remember that nickname that people called me? People knew it more than my actual name."

"Yeah, the Blood God, right?" Levi went still, " *No.* "

"Yeah."

"Fuck this!" Levi threw his arms in the air, "Why can't you just be possessed by a god of like, cherry pits or something?"

"Cherry pits?"

"Would be better than a literal god of blood and violence!"

"Sorry."

Levi sighed, "It's not- It's not your fault. Obviously. But goddess damn, you always draw the short straw, don't you?"

Techno frowned, "I'm beginning to think that myself."

"Alright," Levi said, "So you're possessed by a god whose only purpose is to kill people. Anything else I should know?"

"Uh yeah, actually," he rubbed his arm awkwardly, "It may have implied that I was also, somehow, a god."

"Fucking hell Techno."

"Mhm."

Levi flopped back into the bed. This really was a shit show.

"So," Techno said tentatively, "what do we do now?"

Levi would have to go back to the scouts eventually. What would they do then? Their original plan had just been to smuggle Techno into the walls and have him join the Scouts. That plan had gone south years ago. But now? Now Techno was a cadet, and Levi had his own responsibilities. Their worlds, which had grown independent, had collided for the second time, leaving everything that had been built in shambles. Where did they go from this mess of a present? What did they do?

"Good question," levi dragged a hand over his face, "good fucking question."

—

The plan, when eventually formulated, turned out to be quite simple. Well, simple in principle. Its execution had a few caveats. Not enough to disrail, but enough to annoy.

It was a reworked version of their first plan. The one made in the open prairie of titan territory. It had been modified to account for the recent changes, but it could still work. Techno would still join the Scouts.

The plan essentially boiled down to this: disappear. Techno would abruptly leave the 104th cadet corps southern division, and would not be seen ever again. He would not be a public military figure, nor would he even be officially registered. No one could know he existed. No one besides the Scouts. Coupled with his appearance and strength, his random rise in the military would draw attention to him. Attention he could not afford.

Levi was convinced Techno would be imprisoned or worse if his past was discovered. The cadets of the 104th had been accepting of his appearance, if not a bit put off, but there was no guarantee

that they would be the same if they found out he wasn't from the walls. By some miracle no one had tried digging a little further into his past. In short, he got lucky. Really fucking lucky.

It would be even worse if a stuck up bureaucrat or commanders found out the truth about him. Those were the kind of people who would think of him as a threat to their power and safety. Those were the kind of people who would get rid of such a threat.

"That's not even mentioning the wall religion," Levi had said, "If there's a group of radicals who would hate anyone not from within the walls, it's them. They would probably declare you a crime against the goddesses."

So yeah, Techno wasn't keen on getting caught either.

Of course, there was the possibility that his past would never be discovered. There was even a possibility that he wouldn't be prosecuted for his past. The problem was that the chance was too small, and in the event either did happen, Techno would be in danger. It was safer to keep his existence a secret, that way neither *could* happen. If Techno wasn't hidden, people would at the very least, get suspicious, but if no one knew he existed there would be nothing to be suspicious of.

And so, it was settled. Techno would leave the cadet corps and he would never come back. There was a good chance he would never see some of the people there again. If they never joined the Scouts, today would be the last he saw them.

Of course, this would raise questions among the trainees. Even more so among instructors.

That's what led them to this moment.

Shadis looked up at Levi, sleep still making his eyes foggy, "So let me get this right, Cadet Blade is in fact the man who helped you survive your little stint in titan territory, is not from the walls as far as his memory allows, and is on par with you in combative ability?"

Levi nodded, "Yes."

Shadis gave him a disbelieving look, "and now you want me to help him disappear?"

"Also yes."

Shadis huffed, "Not even a please attached. Where did respect go?"

"You do realize I'm your superior officer, Kieth."

"You do realize that pulling rank to pressure me into this isn't helping your case, Levi."

Levi had nothing to say to that.

Shadis regarded the two of them coolly, "No response? Don't feel like dignifying me with even that? Well, I suppose it's nice to know Cadet Blade fraternizes with similarly disrespectful people. I'm glad, at the very least, that you've found a like minded fuckhead to hang out with."

Techno shuffled his feet awkwardly, "sorry, sir."

"Oh! So *now* you say sir without sarcasm," Shadis faked a grin, "who knew? All it took was me to have leverage over you two."

"Sorry, sir," Techno repeated.

"For fucks sake Cadet Blade! Stand your ground!" Shadis exploded.

Techno was taken aback, "Sir?"

"You're going to be living a life of complete secrecy from now on. Any wrong move could end with your discovery and subsequent death," Shadis rolled his eyes, "You're going to need thicker skin than *that.* You'll never survive if you just bow down to power."

"So you're saying…"

Shadis looked him up and down, muttering, " *And you're going to have to be smarter than that too.* Yes! Obviously I'm going to help you."

Levi jumped back in, "Why?"

"Before I was an instructor I was a Scout commander, Levi," Shadis said, "and before that, I was a man who wanted to know what was out there. I was curious, you could say, foolish even more so. I truly believed I could help free humanity back then."

He scoffed, gesturing around the room, "Look where that got me." his eyes were sad, not quite seeing what was in front of them, instead stuck looking at the past, "I wasted my life away, watching soldier after soldier fall. I was hit with loss after loss, and still kept going. Insanity, it was, hoping that maybe I could actually do something. I was powerless in reality, but I never could quite see that."

Shadis looked at Techno, "Here though? I have something. A small something, but I believe that could actually make a change. Perhaps it's a foolish wish from a man that I thought was long gone. Dead, with his title of commander. Perhaps it's just the ever persisting wish to be able to *do something.* But, I can't help but believe that you could actually change something, Techno. Maybe not free humanity, but at the very least take a step towards doing it."

"Tell me, Techno," Shadis said, "can you do that?"

He hesitated, "yes, sir."

"Oh come on," Shadis growled, "you could hardly convince *Jaeger* with that attitude. And that kid believes everything! So I'll ask you again, can you do it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you do it?"

"Yes sir!"

"I don't believe you Blade!" Shadis shouted, "Can you really do it? Or will you disappoint me?"

"I can do it, Shadis!" he shouted right back, 'Would you like me to write that down for you, sir? Since you seem keen on forgetting what I said the last five times?!"

Shadis whistled, "Now *that's* the response I wanted. Now, what's your cover story?"

Levi frowned, "Cover story?"

"Sweet Maria you two are fucking stupid," Shadis pinched the bridge of his nose, "People will get suspicious if you disappear for no reason."

"We thought you would cover it up."

"I can ignore his disappearance, I can't erase his presence."

"Pretend I died," Techno suggested.

Levi sent him a hurt look. A mix of anger and betrayal.

"Cadet Blade, I very much doubt anyone would believe you would die from anything in this camp. You're Not the type to die from an equipment malfunction. Somehow, I'm sure you'd make it out."

"Not from an equipment malfunction," Techno said, "Something else. Like a disease. Something I can't control."

Shadis thought about it, "There's a breakout of the Shiganshinan plague in Trost right now. That's where you pretend to be from, correct?"

"Yes, it is."

Shadis smiled, a terrifying thing, really, "This is too perfect. Alright, here's the plan. You will leave, under the guise of visiting a relative or friend, who's come down with something terrible. You're afraid it'll be the last time you see them. We say that you will come back though, and when you don't, well, we let the recruits puzzle it out."

Levi scowled, "It would work."

"It would." Shadis agreed.

Techno looked at the two of them, "Well then, what are we waiting for?"

—

"What the fuck was that?" Levi hissed.

The hallway out of Shadis' office was nice and clear, making it so no one would interrupt their conversation. Techno kinda wished it wasn't.

"What do you mean?" Techno replied coolly.

"Don't act coy," Levi growled, "You know exactly what you did. Pretend you're dead? Really?"

Techno paused, meeting Levi's gaze, "I'm sorry, It's the only way it would work."

"There's going to be kids who are going to mourn you, Techno."

"I know."

"I thought that maybe, with what happened, that you wouldn't bring up that option."

"What other choice do I have?!" Techno exclaimed.

"Every other choice!"

" *Do I?"* Techno challenged, anger hot and fresh "Do I really, Levi? What choice have I had in this matter? You think I want to do this? I know those kids Levi, I've trained with them, laughed with them, cried with them! They're my comrades and they're my friends, and now I have to leave them all behind. I'm leaving an entire *life* behind! Everything I have built and fought for in three years just- *just gone!'*

His face was contorted in rage and loss, a strange mix of mourning and anger, hopeless, "I'm not going to leave you alone again, Levi. I *can't* do that to you again, but I can't risk being found out or they will try to kill me! What choice do I have besides going through with this plan? What other option would work?"

Levi was silent.

Techno, realizing what he had done, whispered a quiet, "I'm sorry."

The air was stale between them, cold and tight. It felt like granite, unmoving and solid. What had they come to? What was the world doing to them? What had they done to each other? Why did they always have to choose between happiness and survival?

"I know," Levi said quietly, "I am too."

And he was. He wished there was another way, he always did, but there never was, was there? What other choice did people like Levi and Techno have but to fight? What other choice did they

have but to go through hell and drag everyone through with them?

What choice did they really have at all?

What choice did they have.

—

Sasha stared down at the forest floor. They were playing tag, and she was supposed to be trying to find people to get out. Unfortunately, her mind was somewhere else. She hadn't seen Techno. Normally, this wouldn't be a big deal. Techno was terrifyingly good at using ODM gear, and ten times out of ten, you wouldn't even notice him until he was right behind you. It was honestly horrifying.

But no, that's not what she was worried about. The fact of it was she hadn't seen Techno *all day*. Not at breakfast, not at Titan Lectures, not at hand to hand, not when they were assigning tag teams, and definitely not during the game. It all begged the question, where was he?

It wasn't super unusual for a cadet to skip a day. It wasn't super usual either, given Shadis' volatile nature. She didn't think Techno would skip either. He slacked off, yes, but he would never skip. He wouldn't want to give Eren any ideas-

A hand was over her mouth before she could scream. Someone grabbed her and was holding her down as she tried to struggle out of their grip. They were strong, bigger than her too. Nevertheless, Sasha fought, however futile.

A punch here, a grapple there, a bite there. This was it, she was going to die! Tell her father she loves him!

"Damnit, stop freaking out!" A voice shouted, "It's just me!"

She looked up at her assailant. It was a very familiar man.

"Techno?!" she exclaimed.

He shushed her, "Quiet. I need to tell you something, and you cannot tell anyone else"

She straightened herself up, "What is it?"

He laid his hands on her shoulders. For a moment, he looked almost. . . regretful. "Things aren't going to make any sense for a bit," he said, "You might get a bit scared. You might assume some things. No matter what happens, I need you to remember this. It's something you have to keep to yourself, no matter how much you might want to tell others. Whatever happens Sasha, you will see me again. This isn't the last time, okay?"

"Now matter what happens?" her brow furrowed, "Techno what's going to happen?"

He shook his head, "I can't tell you. You can't tell anyone what I've said."

"Why?"

"I can't tell you."

And with that, he was gone, vanishing into the shadows of the trees, leaving Sasha confused, scared, and worried.

Sasha didn't know it yet, but Techno held true to his word. In the coming weeks, Techno left the 104th for a personal emergency, but he never came back. He was presumed dead by the rest of the cadets. The sentiment was never corrected by the instructors. He was mourned by the 104th, he was missed by the people who had come to call him a friend.

In the coming years, Techno never truly faded from mind. He was like an old wound, scarred over, but still very much present. The 104th would never forget Technoblade, and he in turn, would never forget them.

Through it all, Sasha would wonder what it meant when he'd promised he would see her again.

She supposed it was well in character for him. Staying hidden in the shadows until the right moment to strike. You never knew he was even there, unless he wanted you to.

Till that day came, she had a potato farm to take care of, and a legacy to keep alive.

—

Techno reached under his bunk, feeling around the dark space until his fingers found what he was looking for. He pulled a large box out from under the bed, the wood scraping noisily against the floor.

He blew air across off the top of the box, kicking up clouds of dust and clearing it off. It had been sitting under his bed for a year now, collecting dust and cobwebs.

Gently, he opened the box. He breathed a sigh of relief to see everything was exactly where he left it. Rows of shimmering black armor sat in careful placement. He lifted the chestplate out, admiring it in the low light.

"I was wondering where that went," Levi said absentmindedly.

Techno slid the piece over his head and adjusted the buckles, "I would say it was rusting away, but it can't rust."

"That metal really is incredible."

He clipped his paulderons on, "It's why it was so sought after, and why people would risk their lives to find it."

Levi hummed, returning to silence.

Techno continued to put his armor on, strapping each piece into place. Suits of armor were, as a principle, confusing to wear. There were quite a lot of pieces that each had different places and had a different order to put on. Techno remembered everything. It was like riding a bike, he could never forget. His armor was as much a part of him as his skin or his ever-beating heart.

He slipped his feet into the boots, tightening the straps so they fit. He turned around to face Levi, covered in iridescent armor and arms spread wide, "Well, how do I look?"

Levi took a moment to look him up and down before returning to look at his face, "like the Technoblade I remember."

Techno laughed, "I *am* him."

"Sometimes it's hard for me to believe it," Levi admitted, "sometimes I can't quite believe it's real. That you're here, and you're alive."

Techno's smile fell, "I'm sorry, Levi."

They fell into a strange silence. It wasn't tense, nor awkward, but not comfortable either. It was. . . sad. The silence was one of mourning. Mourning for something that they'd lost, and could never get back. A funeral for three years that they'd wasted.

"You cut your hair," Levi eventually said.

Techno took a moment to process his words, "Yeah, I did."

"It might sound weird," he continued, "But when I saw you for the first time again, that was what struck me first. Not the fact that you were alive, but the fact you had cut your hair. It was so small, but it just- *changed* something."

"It was hard to hide long," Techno explained, "But it's grown out since then. It was much shorter when I first cut it."

"Why'd you keep it short?" he asked. It had been three years. It would have had plenty of time to grow back to its original length.

Techno shrugged, "Just felt like it."

"Really? You never cut your hair when we were back in the forest, even when it was getting in the way. I always thought you had some sort of thing about it."

He shrugged again and slung his axe over his shoulder.

Levi raised an eyebrow, "Really. Just 'cause?."

He thought about it, and started walking away, "Pretty much. My life has changed. I guess it only felt right that I changed with it."

Levi watched as Techno left. He *had* changed. They both had. It hurt in a way, to see someone you knew and feel like they're not the same person anymore. Like you didn't even know them at all now. But, beneath the changes and the time spent apart, Levi could see that the Techno he knew was still there.

He was different, yes. Sweet Maria, he had practically adopted three kids!

But he was still Technoblade. That would never change.

He was and would always be the man Levi met in the forest. The man who fought with the strength of the stars, the man who taught Levi to name the constellations, the man who called himself Techno, and the man Levi called a friend.

—

The horses were tacked and readied. Carl and Minuit -Techno finally had a name to put to Levi's horse. He had to say the name fit. The sleek black mare was gentle and quiet, but quick and deadly. Like her rider, only she swore less- were waiting impatiently to go.

Techno pulled his kids into a hug. It was made much more awkward by the armor he was wearing. He hadn't worn it in a while. He didn't want attention drawn to him and what screamed 'look at me' more than a full suit of armor. It felt like coming home to wear it again, the cold metal whispering 'you're safe' with every clink or scrape it made.

"I'll see you soon," he promised them. The kids had been briefed on the plan. They knew why Techno has to disappear. They knew where he was going. They knew that they would see him again. It didn't make goodbye less painful.

"How soon is soon?" Eren asked.

"Soon," he said, in lieu of answer, because in truth, he did not have one.

He pulled out of the hugs, taking the moment to look at his kids. They were obscured beneath the cover of night, but he could make them out as clear as day. These were his kids. Children he had learned to care for, to love, to protect over the years. It still didn't feel quite real. He tried to commit every single piece of their features to memory.

"I love you," he said, like it was a revelation. It wasn't. Somehow, he had always known, he just hadn't realized what the feeling was until this moment.

"We know," Armin replied.

"And you better not forget it either," he smiled.

A tear slipped down Armin's cheek, "We won't." he promised.

Mikasa tugged at his sleeve.

"What is it?"

"Lean down," she said.

He did as he was told, and a poppy was tucked behind his ear. Strands of pink hair slipping free with the action, brushing gently against his cheek. It was getting long. Mikasa didn't have time to braid it, but he wished she did. He didn't know when she'd be able to again.

"Don't be sad," she said, stirring him from his thoughts, "You look so pretty when you're happy."

"I'll remember to smile."

"No," she dismissed, "You remember to be happy. Not just smile."

He hugged her again, "Thank you, Mikasa."

Techno looked at them again, "Armin, never believe you're less than you are. You're smart, use it. You'll be a better soldier than I could ever be. Everyone will see you as I do one day."

He turned to Eren, "Eren, I've never met anyone as passionate as you. You're going to change the world someday." Techno ruffled Eren's hair, "You've got this, kid."

He looked at the final cadet. Mikasa wasn't crying, wasn't even frowning. She never did. Techno had known her long enough to know it was intentional. She had to be the strong one. She had to be the protector. She wasn't allowed to be weak, not when it might let Eren or Armin get hurt. He knew how it felt, to have that weight of responsibility. To know he could never fail.

"Mikasa, protect your family, but let them protect you in turn. You're incredibly skilled, intelligent, and even kinder. You're not alone, you have Eren and Armin to look out for you too. They'll catch

ya if you fall. Don't let Eren get himself killed, alright?" He leaned over to whisper in her ear, "and if he does anything stupid, kick his ass for me."

She smiled and nodded.

He took in the sight of his kids one last time, "Don't add to the population. Don't subtract from the population unless Armin gives you permission or you're in mortal peril. Stay out of the hospital, the newspaper and jail. If you do end up in jail, establish dominance quickly. I'll see you again."

"Don't die, old man," Eren said.

Techno huffed, "Try not to either."

Carl whinneyed and stomped his hoof. He never thought he could see a horse convey 'can we fucking go already?' so clearly.

Techno hooked his foot into the stirrup and grabbed Carl's mane, quickly throwing himself onto the horse. He looked down at Levi, who had yet to mount Minuit.

"Do you need a mounting block?" he asked.

Levi snorted, "Fuck off."

"A knee up then?"

To his surprise, Levi simply placed his hands on the seat of the saddle, jumped and pushed himself up. Swinging his leg over in one swift move. He dusted himself off and tucked his feet into the stirrups.

"Got a lot of practice with that, don't you," Techno grinned.

Levi scowled, "One day back with you, and the short jokes have already started. Get some original material, or at the very least, be more creative."

"You could say that my comedy *comes up short?"*

Levi took off into a canter without another word.

Techno glanced down at the kids, "Be safe." Then he was riding away, urging his horse to catch up with Levi's.

That was the last time he would see them for two years.

—

"You're a big old softie." Levi said, keeping his eyes fixed on the path before him. Grass and trees whizzed by as they rode. The wind in their ears made it hard to hear each other so they had to speak up.

Techno hummed. He wasn't even going to deny it, "Yeah."

"They're good kids."

"They are." he agreed.

"You might never see them again."

"I will," he said, "They're joining the scouts."

"I know. I mean after that."

Techno sent him an offended look, "You have clearly never met those demon children. They would never die, not if I was still alive. Who's going to drive me insane and make me regret my life choices if not for them? They'd never let that happen."

Levi smiled, a small, subtle thing, "You really believe in them, don't you?"

He nodded, "I do."

"Softie."

"Shut."

—

They reached the Scout headquarters at dusk. The sun was just sinking below the sky, dipping slowly into a pool of night. Twilight crept up on the treeline, an ethereal glow resting around the frame the sun cast, waiting to shine brighter in its absence.

The headquarters themselves were relatively unimpressive. It was a large house - he wouldn't call it a mansion, as that would imply some degree of luxury which it sorely lacked - with a stone base and wooden walls that shared similar styling to many of the buildings in Shiganshina.

To the side of the building he could see open pastures and a horse stable. Some horses were grazing in the fields, sinuous necks sloping down and raising periodically. One was rolling in the dirt. It was, admittedly, cute.

They brought their horses to a gradual stop as the building drew closer so that they were at a light trot by the time they were at the front of the headquarters. Levi threw himself off his horse, and after a moment of hesitation, Techno followed suit.

He grunted as his boots hit the ground. He was sore from the day of full riding, each and every part of him aching. Parts of him he didn't even know he *had* hurt!

He turned to Levi, and very seriously said, "I am in pain."

Levi snorted, "You think you feel bad? I did this twice."

Techno winced in sympathy.

"Captain Levi?"

They both looked towards the new voice. It was a woman with light brown hair and honey brown eyes, their warm color only amplified by the golden light of the sunset. She was standing just beneath the arch of the main door, a look of surprise on her face. Most notably, however, was the fact that she was shorter than Levi. Not by much, but still.

"Petra," Levi said in some strange form of greeting. Ah, so they knew each other.

"Where have you been?" she ran up to them, eyes fixed solely on Levi. Techno doubted she had even seen him. "You've been missing since yesterday."

"Personal errand," Levi responded.

Petra frowned, "You should have at least left a note! People were worried."

"I was gone for one day. If the Scouts are afraid of that, then we have much bigger problems on our hands than me going missing for a minute."

Techno chuckled quietly.

Petra whipped around to look at him. Ah, so she really hadn't noticed Techno's presence at all.

"Who are you?" she asked, an edge of danger to her voice.

"The personal errand," he answered.

Levi sighed, "Techno, meet Petra Ral. Petra, meet Technoblade."

"Technoblade?" she asked, "Is that an alias?"

"No, my mother just had terrible choice in names," as far as he can remember. In truth he didn't know. Maybe it was once an alias, and he just forgot his real name. He sure as hell wasn't going to tell her that, though.

"Ah, well, it's nice to meet you, Technoblade." she offered her hand.

He smiled, taking her hand in a single, frim shake, "likewise, Petra."

"The hell is going on here?" A new voice asked.

Three new people had appeared at the door. The first one, presumably the one who just talked, had grayish hair styled into a similar way as Levi's undercut. He also wore the same cravat that Levi did. He looked like an older, taller Levi.

The second man looked much younger. He had dark brown hair slicked back into a point. His jaw was very narrowed and sharp. He was looking directly at Techno with dark, calculating eyes.

The final man, Techno recognised. He was tall and muscular, with a well built frame and imposing stature. Blond hair was pulled into a bun on the back of his hair with only his fringe not swept back. He was the only one smiling.

Levi pinched the bridge of his nose, "I guess we're doing this now."

Levi gestured to the group, "Techno, meet my team. They and Petra make up the special operations squad. They're the best soldiers in the Scouts, with skill and kill counts to back it up. The gray haired one is Oluo Bozado, the black haired one is Gunther Schultz and the tall blond one is Eld Jinn."

The new group approached them.

Newly named Eld looked at Techno with kind eyes, "I see you made it to the walls."

"I see you're still alive," Techno responded, meeting his smile.

"Finally found out what the Scouts are, then?"

"Took me a while."

Levi looked at the two of them, "I forgot you two met."

"I didn't know you knew such a. . . *character,* Eld," Oluo griped. He was eying Techno warily.

"He stopped a titan from eating me," Eld provided.

"During the fall?" Petra asked.

Eld shook his head, "Before."

"Before? But that would mean he was outside the walls?"

"That's because he was." Eld said, clearly passing the baton to Techno.

"I was alone outside the walls for nearly a year. Six months I was all by myself, but I eventually met and helped Levi after he broke his leg," Techno said, "During which time I met the scouts and killed a titan trying to eat Eld."

"I'm sure you all remember my three month stint outside the walls," Levi cut in. Immediately they all were listening to him. He commanded their attention with an incredible amount of ease, "This is classified information that not even Commander Pixis and Dok are privy to. I was not alone in my return to the walls, but was helped by Technoblade here. I expect this information to stay strictly within the Scouts."

"Technoblade? That's not a real name." Said Oluo. He was rather rude, Techno was beginning to realize.

Techno was also getting really tired of people saying his name wasn't a real name. He'd met people with worse ones. Not many people knew, but Dream's full name was Dreamwastaken. One word. See? He was relatively normal compared to *that*.

"So you're not from the walls, are you?" Gunther asked.

Techno looked to Levi for confirmation, getting a nod in return.

"No," he said.

"Where are you from then?" they asked tersely.

"I'm not sure." Techno lied. He wasn't going to make this interaction any weirder if he could help it, "If it's any consolation I'm not from any civilization outside the walls. From what I've seen, it's just plains, forests, and titans."

Gunther nodded, "That's pretty in line with what we've seen too."

"Please," Oluo scoffed, "No one could have survived outside the walls. Not even a member of the Levi squad."

"Well certainly not you," Petra jeered.

Oluo scowled. He was quick to anger, Techno observed. "Scuse you, I have thirty-nine solo kills. If we were trapped out there, I can guarantee you'd be the first to go."

Gunther gave him a deadpan look, "She has more kills than you."

"And only nine of them are by herself." Oluo argued.

Petra frowned, "You only have so many solo kills because you always go off on your own. You recklessly endanger yourself and this entire team so you can feel like a hero. You already imitate Levi all the time, do you really have to do it in the field?"

Now that she mentioned it, Techno noticed how similarly Levi and Oluo were dressed. It was honestly funny. It was pretty much the same outfit, with only the smallest differences that Techno could discern.

Oluo crossed his arms, "I don't imitate Levi."

"That cravat says differently."

"Wearing a cravat does not mean I'm copying him! It's a very common accessory. Even the weird new guy wears one!"

The attention was back on Techno. He was, in fact, wearing a cravat. It was tucked awkwardly against his chestplate. His clothing was usually more styled than that, but the past twenty four hours hadn't left much time to take care of his appearance.

He blinked slowly, a hand coming up to the cravat, "I've been wearing these for years. If anything, Levi is copying *me."*

"I am not," Levi glared at him.

"I am your senior, you know," Techno said, "I'm the original here."

"Keep dreaming, brat."

"I don't have to, Peregrine."

Petra tilted her head, "You're older than Levi?"

He nodded, "Yes."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty seven."

Petra opened her mouth then closed it, "Levi is thirty four."

"Yes." Techno grinned.

"I-" she paused, "okay."

Techno decided he liked Petra. She was getting used to the insanity quickly. That was a very important trait when being around Techno.

"Is Technoblade going to join the special operations squad?" Eld asked Levi.

He inclined his head, "That is the current plan, yes."

"This weirdo is gonna join us?" Oluo exclaimed, "He probably can't even kill a titan by himself!"

"He survived outside the walls," Petra pointed out.

"And I already said that's impossible," Oluo shot back.

"It's possible," Levi shut him down, "He's the only reason I'm alive, or would you like to argue with that too, Oluo?"

Oluo looked up, shocked at his captain's disagreement. A second passed, then, "No, sir."

Levi pinned him with a hard look, "Good."

"Why is your hair pink?" Gunther questioned Techno.

"A god cursed me," Techno said arily.

"How did you survive outside the walls?" he continued, unperturbed by Techno's seemingly nonsensical answer.

"Years of experience, strength, and a healthy dose of will to spite the gods."

"Techno," Levi gave him a disapproving look, "You're just going to confuse them."

"Ah, right." he looked over the squad, "Let's start again. Hello, I'm Technoblade. I woke up outside the walls without a single clue how I got there, I met and subsequently saved Levi, and I officially do not exist in the walls."

He was met with silence.

Then, thanks to a brave Petra, "What?"

Techno grinned, "I look forward to working with you."

—

Erwin was tallying up the Scouts expenses. It had been a bad month. They had to compensate more families than normal and lost two wagons in the last expedition. The price for swords had also gone up since Maria's fall. Pretty much everything had, from food to horses to equipment. It had been three years, but the budget had never been increased in that time so the higher price weighed heavily on the Scouts.

He scratched a number onto the parchment. His pencil snapped beneath his fingers.

He scowled at it.

The increased expenses had cut the already precarious ink budget. Now he was left working with charcoal pencils. Not even the fancy ones they sold in sina. No, they were literally forced to use firewood charcoal that was whittled down into a thin pencil.

Maybe if they cut some of the money going to, and he quotes, 'giant metal nails to stick into titans for experiments' they could afford ink. Hange wouldn't be happy with that one though. He really was stuck between a rock and a hard place with his choices. He could either continue to write with charcoal, or he could face an angry Hange.

…

Charcoal it was.

Erwin sighed and grabbed another piece of charcoal, pressing it down into the paper to continue his write up.

Of course, that was the moment Levi decided to kick the door in.

The pencil snapped between his fingers. Again.

"Godess fucking damnit." he cursed.

"Hello, Erwin." Levi said, voice monotonous.

Erwin dragged a hand over his face, "If you've come to complain about the ink, save us both the trouble and leave."

A head popped around the doorframe. "There's a problem with the ink?" a pink haired man asked.

Erwin startled to his feet. How could he have forgotten? He had literally sent Levi out to confirm if Cadet Blade was their mystery man yesterday! He just supposed that with the additional expenses and the whole budget problem he had just gotten caught up. That wasn't even mentioning the government breathing down his neck about getting results in Maria. And the Ink budget. There was a lot occupying his mind-

"Erwin, meet Technoblade," Levi gestured to the other man, "He is, indeed, our Technoblade from the forest. And he has been alive for the three years we thought him dead."

Erwin put on a smile, looking at Technoblade, "I must say, it's good to finally meet you in person."

"Same. Levi has talked about you from time to time," Techno responded, "It's nice to meet a fellow commander."

"You're a commander?" he asked, mind racing. His brain was already flooded with possibilities, an infinite number of scenarios playing out before him.

"Former," Techno amended.

Erwin tried and failed to contain his curiosity, "of what army? Of what country?"

"Antarctic Empire," Techno answered, "though, it doesn't exist here."

Erwin rested his chin on his knuckles, eyes shining with interest, "go on."

Techno took the seat on the other side of his desk, "I have a story for you. The question is if you'll believe it."

Erwin grinned something feral, "I'll try my best,"

Techno matched the grin, then slowly he began to talk.

And in that dusty office, in a rickety old building of a crumbling regiment, Technoblade told a tale older than the constellations, one longer than history. He spoke of another world, of magic, of heroes and countries. Of an empire so vast it reached heaven and hell. Of a family broken over crowns and ice. Of a man who carried the night on his wings and of brothers who loved and lost. He told of betrayal, of use, of nightmares and dreams.

Hours ticked away as he told his tale in full, as it had never been told before, and as it never would be again.

He spoke of the stars and the moon, their dance across the sky, and their fall to the sun. Wars and peace, blood and death, flowers and family.

Technoblade spoke of a man with gold in his hair, and a god in his head.

—

"Well," Erwin said, pouring himself a shot. He wasn't really sure when alcohol came in. Probably around the part about the End and Nether. He downed the shot, "That was certainly something."

Techno tilted his head back, staring at the ceiling, "It's the truth."

"I know," he said.

"So you believe me?"

Erwin hummed, "You'll need to give me a bit more time for that one."

Techno looked back down at him, "You're a smart man, Erwin Smith. Only a fool would believe all that immediately."

"I'm a crazy man, more like," he dismissed, "for only someone truly insane would even consider it to be true."

"That's good. You'll have to have at least a few screws loose, if you want to have any chance of freeing humanity," Techno said camly, "No one within their right mind would choose to fight for the impossible."

Erwin took a slow sip of his drink, "I suppose."

"Erwin, may I ask you a question? Commander to commander." Techno asked.

"Go ahead, Blade."

"What is it you fight for? Techno tilted his head, a slight incline just so that his eyes glinted like gold in the lamp light, "what is it that pushes you forward, to continue despite the neverending losses?"

It was a question Erwin had heard many times. Mostly at budget meetings or in conversation with other military branches. Why? What drove him to risk his life, and the lives of his entire regiment for what was essentially, a pipe dream?

The answer was one he had said many times. Repeated and told and preached a million and a half times. It came as naturally to him now as breathing did nowadays. It was second nature now. To the point he could believe it himself, sometimes.

"To free humanity," he answered.

The answer was easy, the answer was planned, the answer had lived and died on his lips for years and years. The answer was a lie.

He had never wanted to 'free humanity'. That had always been a happy side effect of his true dream.

A dream born from a single theory his father had. A theory Erwin had shared. A theory that got his father killed. A theory that he would die and send others to the same fate just to prove correct.

Humanity was not free, his father had said. Why didn't they remember anything outside the walls? Why were no stories passed down from parent to child, telling them of a world free from titans? Why didn't they know what that was like? Why would they forget, unless someone wanted them too?

Someone like a king, who needed easy subjects to control.

Why would his father be killed for the theory? Why, if it wasn't true?

Perhaps it was selfish of him to pursue such a dream based on a single, selfish desire. Perhaps it was wrong to send hundreds to die for that reason. Perhaps he was a bad man. When he really got down to it, Erwin Smith was a terrible person. Not even a person, really. An entity, dedicating its life to a single, greedy goal.

Techno stared at him, eyes cutting right through him. Their crimson was sharp and deadly, clear and unclouded. These were eyes that could cut, eyes that could burn, eyes that could *see.*

Erwin looked at Techno right back. Trying to understand the man that lived beneath his midnight armor and the walls he held up.

They were like that for a time. He didn't know how long it was, in truth. The two of them looked at each other, like if they just kept trying they could see who the other really was.

Then, Techno smiled.

"That's a noble goal, Commander," he said, "I hope you can achieve it."

"And you?" Erwin asked, "What's your reason? You have no ties to this humanity, which is not your own. You have no reason to risk your life for them."

"I'm not," Techno said plainly, "I'm not fighting them. And why should I?"

"Then what's your reason?"

"Have you ever had a family, Commander?"

Erwin said, "I have."

"Then you know why I do what I do," Techno said, "I've started wars for my family. I've conquered worlds and toppled regimes for them."

"So you're really not fighting for humanity as a whole?"

"Not in the slightest," Techno said, "I'm fighting for the people I care about."

Erwin poured himself a final drink, "Some might say that's selfish."

"And I would say those people are hypocrites," Techno said, staring right at him, "No one is that selfless."

Erwin downed the drink.

"Do you wholeheartedly believe that you can win this war, Blade?"

"That, or I die trying," Techno grinned, "and Technoblade never dies."

"You're confident."

"I'm realistic."

"It won't be easy."

"Wasn't expecting it to."

"You will lose people."

For once, Techno was quiet, "I know."

"And you can deal with that?" Erwin asked.

"I've lost people before," Techno said, voice lined with a sort of danger to it, "Trust me when I say death is one of the easier ways to lose them."

There was resolve in his voice. Techno was a soft speaker, each word low and melodic. He spoke in a strange monotone, like nothing really could phaze him. He spoke like his words meant nothing, as though they were as fickle as air, there one second, gone the next. But, beneath his soft, slow cadence there was a solid base. One that did not waver, one that did not move. It was like his words were built on a foundation of granite. His message unflinching despite the challenge.

Erwin found that Techno was similar to the way he spoke. He seemed capricious, or perhaps vacillate, but he would not budge for the things he believed in.

Technoblade believed in their victory. Technoblade believed in Levi. In some way, because of those things, Technoblade believed in the Scout regimine.

"May I ask you a question, Blade? Commander to Commander."

"Shoot," he said.

"Are you ready to die?" Erwin wondered if he himself was. He was ready to die for this cause. However, he didn't know if he was ready for death itself. He didn't know, and that was what frightened him. How could he risk his life if he wasn't prepared to lose it?

How could any of the Scouts believe they could win if they weren't ready to pay that ultimate price?

Techno looked down at his hands, flexing and unflexing his fingers a couple times. He turned his hands over, observing the silver scars that covered them, from the tips of his fingers to where they

disappeared under the cuff of his sleeve. Each scar had a story, each scar was a constellation across his skin. From war, to death, to love. They all left their mark.

Techno looked back up, meeting Erwin's eye, "I think, Commander, that I have been ready to die for a long time."

And Erwin believed it. Could hear the solidity of his words. It was resignation in some way, as if it was admission of a defeat, instead of the acknowledgment of strength that it was. Maybe, Erwin mused, it was both.

"Well then," Erwin leaned back in his chair, gesturing a single hand to the room around them. With its crumbling walls and sagging foundations, it was pitiful. But, it was still standing. Much like the people that called it home, it had yet to give up. "Welcome to the Scouts."

Chapter End Notes

Wowie mister, that sure was 14k. Sorry this chapter took so long. ACTUALLY JK MY CHAPTERS CAN TAKE HOWEVER THE FUCK LONG I WANT THEM TOO! This is a form of stress relief for me, not a new stressor. If you get upset about chapter waits, I hear you, I feel you (trust me I've been waiting like five months for a fic to update), I see you. Counterpoint, I'm lazy.

Song of this chapter: The distance - CAKE

No art this chapter.

Can you tell I don't like Oluo?

Yes, Techno wears Cravats, fight me.

The chaos trio were briefed on The Plan(tm) so they know Techno isn't dying.

I did make a Tumblr if you wanna scream at me or submit fan art *intense batting of eyelashes* if you ever do that *more eyelash batting*

Okay, I don't really have much to else say. Uhhhhh comment. It gives me life.

See ya next time.

Fly. Please Fly Away!

Chapter Summary

Techno's stay with the Scouts.

ALSO BEFORE YOU READ THIS GO LOOK AT [THIS AMAZING, AWESOME, INCREDIBLE, FUCKING BEAUTIFUL PIECE OF FANART](#) omg its the first piece of fanart I've ever gotten ;-; thank you so much

Chapter Notes

I'm all sure we're shaken up by recent news. My opinion on the matter boils down to this. Just because a creator has to die, does not mean that their creation has to as well. Technoblade gave us an incredible community, story and character. I don't want to lose that. Even if that means continuing to write a silly little fanfic, I want to keep that alive. I want to keep creating content and works of art for something I love. You can talk about this in the comments, but do try to keep most of the stuff about the actual fit :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Techno had barely made it out the door of the Commander's office when he was ambushed.

He is tackled to the floor, hitting the ground heavily. He was caught unaware, leaving him no time to recover as the assailant continued their attack. They were trying to pin him down and immobilize his limbs. Panicked, he lashed out, grabbing at anything he could find.

His hands found his attacker's arm, and in a quick twist of his body, he flipped them. Now he was above the person. He held them down even as they tried to struggle out of his grip. They were much weaker than him. Good, easier to subdue. In a flash, he pulled a knife from his boot, flipping it into an icepick grip. He drove it down, aiming straight for the jugular-

"Techno stop!"

And suddenly Techno was being pulled off the body - body, not the corpse it should be - by Levi. He tried to lunge forward, but Levi held him firmly in place.

"Don't!" Levi hissed in his ear, the command firm, "They're friendly!"

He stopped struggling, "They tried to kill me."

Levi loosened his grip, "They're not trying to kill you. They just have terrible choice of introduction." The last half was said louder, clearly directed at his assailant.

Techno looked at the person on the floor, currently rubbing the arm that Techno had grabbed.

They were a person with long brown hair pulled back into a ponytail. A pair of glasses sat crooked on their nose, clearly knocked ajar in their earlier altercation. The glasses framed a pair of brown eyes that were blown wide with awe.

They were making a strange expression. It was halfway between a gape and a grin. It was. . . honestly creepy.

Oh, and the person was laughing too.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry," They stumbled to their feet, "I got excited. You're so strong! How much weight can you lift? You must be able to lift a lot if you can scale a titan without ODM gear! Is it true you can do that? I've heard so many stories about it-"

"Hange, please," Levi crossed his arms.

"Fine, fine," they waved him off, turning their attention to Techno, "Pleasure to meet you. I'm Hange Zoe!"

Techno kept his guard up, "Technoblade. Sorry about, uh, throwing you to the ground."

"Sorry about the surprise attack!" they apologized, smile still bright. It didn't really feel like an apology, "I just really wanted to see if you were as strong as I heard."

Techno made a face, leaning over to Levi to whisper, "I know I have no right to judge, but are they all there, ya know, mentally?"

"Absolutely not," Levi whispered back, "they're batshit crazy. You get used to it."

"Ah."

"I cannot overstate how excited I am to meet you," Hange continued, "There's so many questions I have for you. So many experiments I want to try."

Techno frowned, "Experiments?"

"Of course! You, Blade, are one big mystery. I happen to love solving them," they explained, a glint in their eye, "I've been hearing stories about you. It's not everyday you meet a man who came back to life."

"Hange, have some tact," Levi chastised.

"Tact has no place in the scientific process!" They exclaimed, "We'd get nowhere with *tact*. Now follow me, Mystery man! We have experiments to attend to!"

"Hange, it's nearly midnight," Levi said, "We're running on four hours of sleep here."

"That's pretty good." Hange noted absentmindedly. Techno couldn't help but agree. He'd worked with far worse before. Not that he would admit that right now. He wasn't keen on finding out what kind of 'experiments' Hange had in store for him.

Levi paused, "Hange, when did you last sleep?"

"Wednesday."

Levi sighed longsufferingly, "Hange it's Tuesday."

"And? Your point."

"Where's Moblit? I refuse to believe he let you do that," Levi glared at them accusingly, "What did you do?"

Hange looked away guilty, "Now Levi don't you think it's a bit presumptuous to assume I did anything?"

"What. Did. You. Do."

"Nothing I swear!"

"Hange."

Hange was wrung their hands together nervously, "I may have slipped something into his whiskey. He's been out cold for ten hours."

Okay. It was official. Techno is never letting Hange near his food or drink. Ever.

Levi crossed his arms, "That's it. We're all going to get some rest. You're going to apologize to Moblit when he wakes up. Everything else can wait for tomorrow."

"But-"

"No, you don't get an opinion. Get some rest or I will make you."

Hange slumped down, a pout on their lips, "You're no fun Levi. Has anyone told you that?"

"Numerous times," Techno said.

Levi looked at him, betrayed, "You know what? Nevermind. Experiments sound pretty good."

"Yes!" Hange cheered, grabbing Techno's arm and trying to drag him away. It did not work very well on the account of the weight difference and the fact that Techno very much did *not* want to do that.

"In the morning," Levi amended, "You can do them in the morning Hange."

Hange smiled, "That is as good as I'm going to get!" They released Techno and slipped out of the hallway, casting a single glance over their shoulder, "See you tomorrow, Cadet."

Techno watched them go, only speaking when they were long gone, "I'm going to die, aren't I?"

"No, of course not," a beat, "Probably."

"I cannot believe you just signed me up for that," Techno complained, "traitor."

"Pot, Kettle," Levi said, "and besides, you've died before. You'll be fine."

Down the hallway, Techno heard maniacal laughter.

"Right," he said stiffly, "Why wouldn't I be?"

—

Levi guided him through the halls. He moved quietly, walking with soft footsteps. The rest of the Scouts had gone to sleep, so he tried to be quiet as not to wake them. He spoke to Techno as they walked, his voice never going above a whisper.

"We'll need to find you a room," he said, "which shouldn't be too hard considering the fact there's plenty of room. Goddesses knows the Scouts have never fully filled a building. All the rooms are bunks, housing two to three people, but I'm sure we can get you an empty room if you want."

"Preferably one with a good lock, so no one gets hurt," he laughed. It was only half a joke. He didn't want to accidentally murder a Scout at night.

Levi shot him a disapproving look.

Techno's smile fell, "What? You know I'm not exactly safe to be around."

"You'll be fine," Levi dismissed, "and if things go wrong you have me here to stop you."

"Yeah," Techno said, brightening up the slightest bit, "Yeah, I guess I do."

—

In the end, after some deliberation, Techno was placed in the room beside Levi's. It was mostly chosen from the proximity to Levi, partly because of the size. It had two beds and wasn't too big, so Techno didn't feel like he was wasting an absurd amount of space. It also gave him extra room to store his armor and - albeit meager - possessions.

There was no lock on the door.

It made Techno uneasy. If someone went in the room, or god forbid he tried to leave it, while he was asleep someone might get seriously hurt. He might kill someone.

But, Levi was right across the hall. Levi would stop him.

He took more comfort in that than he would like to admit.

Techno stepped into the doorway of the empty room.

It was,

Underwhelming.

Techno had wondered many times what joining the scouts would really be like. So many nights spent awake, imagining this exact moment. From when he first met Levi, falling asleep with his back to the nook's wall, to when he stared at the ceiling of the cadet bunkhouse, wondering when things went wrong.

He pictured so many scenarios. One's where he was welcomed with open arms, the Scouts laughing with him over a meal. He imagined futures where he was met with scorn and fear, shouts and insults directed his way. He dreamed of joining with the kids, being together as they braved this new world.

This was not that.

The room was clean, smelling of soap and polished wood. Lamplight from the hallway spilled into the room, casting his shadow along the floor, stretching back into the room even as Techno stood only at its threshold.

"Good night," Levi said, stepping into his own room, "get some rest."

Techno stared into the room, taking in the scuffed floors and liquid shadows, "right. I will."

He walked past the doorway, finally entering the room.

The air was stale, sitting in an uncomfortable state of calm. It felt like no one had been in the room for years. Logically, Techno knew the contrary. What with the cleanliness and lack of dust he knew someone routinely cleaned it. It was probably Levi.

Still, he couldn't help but feel that no one had *lived* there for years. Who knew who the last person to inhabit the room was. Were they a Scout? Did they die outside the walls? Had anyone slept in here since they died?

Techno got the impression he was the first after a long time. This room was old, he could feel it. Deep in his bones, he could tell the building was older than most history in the walls recalled. The room was just as old.

In some way, Techno related to the room, crazy as it sounded. The room wasn't nearly as old as him, but it had the quality of someone who was. It was a little beaten, a little strange, a little cold, maybe even underwhelming. It was lonely. Housing no one for what had probably been decades. It had no one. Techno understood that.

But now, after years and years of being alone, Techno was there.

After forever, it had someone.

Techno was beginning to understand that, too.

He sat himself on the bed, feeling it creak under his weight. Slowly, he began removing his armor.

The room was a little drab, he had to admit. He might want to clear out the other bed, bring in a desk. Maybe a potted plant. He'd seen a stall selling succulents on the way to Scout HQ. He could buy one. Get some personal items in here.

He laid his armor on the other bed.

He should get some storage too. A chest or dresser. Just something to put his clothes and stuff in.

Possibly even by a stand for his weapons instead of leaning them up against the windowsill he thought, right as he was doing just that. His sword started falling over. He caught it, set it up again, and made sure it wouldn't fall. Definitely a stand for his weapons, then.

Techno climbed into bed. The blankets were kind of scratchy, but warm. They'd do.

He closed his eyes, and though terrified, let sleep take him.

—

"So," he drawled, pacing around the Imperial Palice's throne room - which was soaked with blood but that wasn't really important right now - "You're a god, huh."

The Blood Good sat on the throne. Historically there were two thrones in the room. One for Techno and one for Phil. They were co-rulers after all. As time progressed, more thrones were added. One for Tommy and one for Wilbur. There was never just one though. Techno supposed the Blood God wanted it to be that way.

"That much was obvious," *he responded, resting his chin on his hand.*

"Pardon me for thinking you might be some figment of my imagination," Techno said dryly, "It's not everyday a literal god takes over your mind."

"For you, it is," *he smiled.*

"So you really have been with me since the beginning," Techno walked towards the throne. He flourished the sword in his hand, sending an arc of blood flying off it. Remnants of the nightmare that came before.

*The god watched as he approached, regarding him with a cold eye, **"I have."***

Techno walked up to him, and sat down on the second throne. The throne that did not exist a second prior. He remembered the throne clearly, after sitting on it for so many years. Conjuring it up in his mind was easy as breathing.

The Blood God's face twitched in annoyance, before returning to controlled calm.

Techno gave the God a deadpan look, "It's my dream too, fuckface."

Screaming filled the throne room, thousands of voices shouting at him, their voices like nails on chalkboard. It was like the screech of metal when blade met blade, or the sound of a phantom as it tried to kill you.

Technoswear

Techno has a potty mouth

Family friendly my ass

Can't believe you've done this

Unsubscribed

Booo! No swearing! I'd watch Tommy if I wanted to hear that!

Technoswear

Bad Techno

They were all jokes he'd heard a thousand times. Not a single one was funny anymore. He doubted they ever were. He'd always played the phenomena off for laughs. Oh look! Techno can't swear or chat goes nuts! Wasn't that just a hoot.

It had never been about the swearing.

It was about control. The control Techno did not have. The fact he couldn't say the things he wanted too. The fact he couldn't get angry. The fact he couldn't get sad. The fact he couldn't cry. The fact he couldn't do anything *without ridicule! Not without thousands of voices criticizing him! Analyzing everything he did! Screaming at him, belittling him, making him worthless. Because, to those voices, he did nothing right if he wasn't killing everyone he saw.*

"Do you know," Techno started slowly, "What it's like to live every moment of your life afraid?"

The Blood God didn't reply.

Techno continued, "Well do you? Can you imagine the way that feels? The constant terror of living?" his voice grew louder as he spoke, "Do you know what it's like to wake up in the morning, unsure if your family is alive? To not know if you've killed them while you dreamed?"

The walls of the throne room trembled, the chandeliers and pillars shook with a growing roar.

"Do you know," he stood up, looming over the god. The God who watched him with indifferent eyes, "Do you know what it's like to never live a day without fighting!?"

The chandelier fell to the ground, the expensive crystal shattering and exploding sending an explosion of shards across the room. The walls started to crumble and fall, hitting the ground with a deafening boom and sending up clouds of dust

"Do you know," Techno was shouting now, voice thunderous, "what it's like to never have control!? To never be fully yourself?! To always be half a person and half a blade? To be a monster?! Do you know what it's like to be terrified of yourself?!"

The Blood God stood sharply, and suddenly the noise of crashing walls and screaming voices was gone. The brightly lit throne room had vanished, replaced with somewhere dark and cold. Techno was bound in chains, his arms tied to the ground so he couldn't stand nor move. He was being forced to kneel.

The Blood God leaned down so they were face to face. He wore an ungly sneer on Techno's face, **"No. I don't. Does that make you feel better?"**

The Blood God rose, stepping away from him, **"I have, and always will be, the one in control. I am not afraid. I am what makes you afraid, because I am the one pulling the strings, I am the one making the calls, I am the order to kill that you fight over and over and over. I have control."**

He gestured around them, to the chains that bound Techno, and to the dark and lonely room, **"Throw your fits. Rebel if you like. Build yourself a throne in a dream and tear down palace walls. Pretend you have a family, even. I don't care. Because in the end, it doesn't matter. When all is said and done, we will end up right where we began. I will stand above you, all the cards in my hand, and you will be below me, afraid, alone, naught but the sword I wield."**

His expression changed, softening into a patronizing smile, **"You asked if I've ever been afraid? Not have control? No, I have not. Nor shall I be."**

A sword materialized in the Blood God's hands. He took a step back, placing the blade at Techno's throat.

"But," *the God continued dangerously, the blade biting into Techno's skin and drawing blood,* **"If you continue to defy me, Blade, I will make sure that you will be. Each day of your life you will be afraid. You'll be one second away from killing everyone you hold dear. You will never stop fighting me, and I'll never stop until you give in."**

The Blood God put pressure on the blade, cutting painfully into his neck, **"Obey me, or you'll never be free of your fear. You will live every second of eternity absolutely terrified."**

Techno spat at them, meeting their midnight eyes with a challenging glare, "bring it on, bastard."

He snarled, ***"So be it."***

The Blood God drove the sword down, intent to bring it across his neck in one clean stroke.

Techno startled awake, just before the sword touched his skin.

—

Levi startled awake, hand darting for the knife he kept under his pillow. Living in the underground had made him a light sleeper, aware of his surroundings even as he slept. Someone was in the room with him. He found the knife and shot up from the bed.

He didn't see anyone.

"It's just me," a quiet voice said.

Levi whipped his head around towards the sound. Techno was sitting in the corner of his room, back pressed to the wall. His head was buried in his knees, arms wrapped around them both.

"Techno," Levi dropped his guard, "how long have you been here?"

"Few minutes," Techno answered, "Sorry for waking you up."

"What's wrong," Levi asked, padding over to where Techno was.

"Nothing." came the gruff reply.

"Techno," Levi warned.

Techno made a small humming sound. It was halfway to a whimper. After a moment, the quiet voice came through again, "Am-" he sunk further into himself, "Am I a monster, Levi?"

"No." He replied immediately.

"Oh," Techno said, still not looking at him, "That's good."

"Yeah," Levi agreed, "Yeah it is."

Neither of them went back to sleep that night, instead they stayed awake in each other's company until the sun rose.

—

Techno knew that the Scout Regimine was ultimately, a research division. They were meant to find what was out there beyond the walls. They were meant to learn and report. Hopefully, they could free humanity, but before that came research.

It made sense that they had an entire squadron dedicated to research. The Fourth Squad was the research division of the scouts. They were led by Hange Zoe and were in charge of learning about titans and developing new equipment to fight them.

Like he said, Techno knew this. He had completely zoned out through most of Titan Lectures but he *did* pay attention whenever the Scouts were mentioned.

He did not, however, anticipate how large of an operation Fourth Squad actually was.

Hange guided him through the massive tarps and tents they had set up. All around him was noise. There was the sound of pounding metal, the crackling fire from a forge, horses pulling carts, and the creak of pulleys as new structures were set up.

It was quite amazing, really. Everywhere he looked there was something going on. There were blacksmiths, weapons development, and a bunch of stuff he didn't even know how to categorize. Like the amount of giant nails, chains, ropes, and tents. He doubted it was all the Fourth squad, but at least that portion of it seemed to be.

A groaning roar cut through the ambient noise.

Techno had drawn his sword before he even thought about it, "Titan!" he yelled. How did one get in here? They were well within Wall Rose. There shouldn't be titans for miles and even then there was a giant fucking wall in between them. Unless… could the wall have been breached?

Hange turned around and grinned, seeing his panic, "Oho! You are going to love this!"

They grabbed his hand and dragged him into a tarped off area. The area was swarmed with scouts, many of them holding clipboards and the rest decked out in ODM gear and holding their swords at the ready.

In the middle of the scene, was a titan. Ropes and chains held it to the ground, a thick metal collar around its neck. It was immobilized so it could barely move an inch in any way. The titan was easily an eight-meter, still towering over the scouts even bound as it was.

"Technoblade, meet Lectrer!" Hange gestured excitedly to the titan.

"That's a titan," Techno said dumbly.

"Yes. Wow with those observational skills you could easily be part of the research division!"

"You just keep it?" Techno asked, "as a pet?"

"No, no," Hange said, "Not as a pet. I like to think of him more as a friend!"

"A friend," Techno repeated, taking in the way Lecter was chained and tied to the ground. Large iron nails were being drilled into the titans appendages, sticking out of the flesh every which way.

Hange noticed his discomfort, "We do this for his safety. If he got loose we would have to kill him." they walked over to Lecter and ruffled his hair, "and we wouldn't want that, now would we?" Hange said that last part to the titan.

Lecter tried to bite Hange in response, but because of his restraints he was only able to get his lips around the leg of Hange's pants.

"Squad Leader!" a man with light brown hair ran over, looking like the personification of anxiety, "Get back! It's not safe to be that close!"

Hange just laughed, continuing to ruffle Lecter's hair, "Nonsense Moblit! Lex here is perfectly safe."

Lecter let out a roar. He seemed to disagree with Hange.

Techno glanced over the steaming restraint system and the slowly evaporating blood that coated them, "What do you do with him."

"Experiments, obviously!"

Techno watched as another nail was drilled into Alexander, "What kind of experiments."

"Oh you know, the usual," Hange said, "Attempts at communication, sunlight deprivation, pain tolerance, weak points, regeneration times. Simple stuff."

Sharp red eyes slid over to Hange, an even sharper smile accompanying it, "Am I to go through the 'usual' set of experiments?"

Hange opened their mouth, but Moblit jumped in before they could actually say anything. "Of course not!" he said reassuringly, "You won't be forced to do anything you don't want to do. We were thinking more along the lines of strength tests, reaction time, endurance, speed, that sort of thing."

Hange pawed at the pommel of his sword, "and of course testing out your equipment. I've never seen any metal of this color before."

Techno stopped them before they pulled the sword fully out. They pouted at him.

"Alright," Techno said, feeling better, "I can do that."

Hange beamed.

—

Molbit gaped at the spectacle in front of him. A pencil tumbled out of Hange's hand, hitting the floor with a soft *'clack'*.

Right, so, here was the thing. They hadn't expected this. They had obviously known Technoblade would be strong. He was the Angel of Shiganshina after all. He could scale up titans with his bare strength. He was also very outwardly muscular. But, he wasn't *overly* muscular either. He had broad shoulders and well defined arms and legs, but he wasn't a walking brick of muscle that paraded around lifting competitions. He was just well built. So they assumed his strength would match his appearance, if not exceed it a little.

They had not expected this.

Techno was bench pressing every weight they had on hand, plus a bunch of random bullshit they had to throw on as well, when they ran out of actual equipment. A sheen of sweat was on his forehead, and he was breathing hard, but he was still lifting and lowering the massive weight load in steady repeating motions.

Hange looked at the clipboard in their hands, tallying up all of the added weights.

1,300lbs. Techno was lifting over a thousand pounds, *repeatedly.* With what some would call ease.

Sweet Maria.

"Squad leader?"

Hange gulped, "Yes, Moblit?"

"Permission to grab something to drink?"

"Water?"

"Something stronger."

"Permission granted," Hange's fingers twitched excitedly, "just grab me something too."

—

Their experiments quickly devolved from there. Strength continued to go downhill, ending with Techno matching every single new challenge they threw at him - "But, how?!" "Perks of being haunted by a god, I guess." "Haunted by a WHAT?!" - Speed tests went similarly, leaving them blown away, as Techno broke human record after record.

With the involvement of alcohol, everything slowly broke down. Soon they were doing the Fourth Squad's favorite pastime. Drunk science.

"I don't see how this is an accurate test of my reaction time," Techno said, concerned.

Hange continued to load an arrow into a bow, "Shut up, Cadet."

"I-" he wasn't a cadet? Well technically he was. He never formally resigned from the military.

"This seems like a bad plan," He pressed. Standing 20 meters away from a loaded long bow, pointed directly at you, tended to leave one unsure.

"-s' a gret plan," Moblit slurred, helping Hange load the bow. He took another sip of something Techno was pretty sure was Vodka. Techno already missed sober Moblit, even after barely meeting him. He seemed like the only voice of reason in the room.

"Twange!' the bow went off, suddenly and unexpectedly, startling both Moblit and Hange. The arrow shot through the air like a bullet.

Techno snatched the bolt out of the air, the sharp edge an inch from his forehead. He moved it aside and raised an eyebrow at the two of them.

Hange hiccuped, a drunken flush on their cheeks, "sorry?"

Techno just sighed, "Moblit, pass me that bottle. I'm going to need it to get through this."

—

"C'm on ya' sl'wpoke, y're faster th'n this!" Hange shouted, galloping away. Their personal horse was a shaggy brown thoroughbred. Which made it confusing that they were riding a brown and white paint. To answer the questions that were asked once sober, No, Moblit did not know where they got it from. No, Hange had no memory of stealing it. No, they still hadn't found the owner.

A pink haired man chased after the horse, lagging behind. He was doing a remarkable job of keeping pace, even as he slowly fell back.

"I'm trying!" he shouted back, willing his legs to go even faster.

He only served to make himself trip, face planting into the dirt.

—

Levi popped his head into the research tent, "Hey, Techno, you still alive-"

Techno and Hange were braiding flower crowns into Lecter's hair. Moblit was passed out on the floor, bottle of booze still clutched tightly in his hand.

Levi slowly backed out of the tent.

—

Eventually, the day had to come to an end. And what an end it was, Levi holding Techno up as he drunkenly stumbled back to his room.

"I'm not sure if I should be happy or not that you like Hange," Levi said.

"They terrify me," Techno mumbled.

"Now you know how the rest of us feel."

Techno stumbled, "D' you think the r'st of the scouts will like me?"

"Who cares what they think? They're all pretty much idiots."

"But they're your fr'ends. Right? I want them to like me," Techno stressed.

Levi nudged the door to Techno's room open, "I'm sure they'll like you just fine."

Techno smiled, hopeful, "Really?"

Levi walked into the dark room, expression darkening, "They'd better."

Techno titled his head, "what was that?"

"Nothing."

He helped Techno down onto the bed, making sure he didn't just topple over. The day of 'science' had left him *very* intoxicated. Levi's eyes flicked over to a small cut on Techno's cheek. It had scabbed over, but was bleeding quite a bit when fresh,

"Maybe next time don't let them convince you to juggle swords when drunk." he tried to say, but Techno had already passed out. Levi just huffed, "Nevermind. Goodnight, Techno."

Techno's lips quirked up in a smile, even in his sleep.

He didn't have any nightmares that night.

—

Techno's introduction was as most things in the Scouts were. That was to say, somber and succinct.

He stood before a crowd, red eyes sliding slowly over the room, taking it all in. Erwin was giving some speech, 'don't let word of his existence get out' and 'extremely useful' and 'not from the walls' and so on and so forth. Erwin had made sure Techno would be able to tell people of his real

background, if he so felt the need. Other than that, what everyone got as a background was 'trapped outside the walls, with severe amnesia'.

He was fine with that. Anything else would only drive people away, brew distrust. Blood red eyes slid over the crowd. Brown and blue eyes stared back, wariness and fear regarding him coolly. *And,* he thought, *looking at it distrust was already in the air.*

Erwin droned on with his speech, *'treat with respect', 'fellow human', 'safe',* Techno wasn't listening.

He very much doubted the crowd was either.

—

Techno practiced his smile in the mirror that night, critiquing each defect and ironing it out until it was picture perfect. Or at least he tried too.

Too bright. Looks fake.

Too wide. Looks aggressive.

Too slanted. Forced.

Too small. Insincere.

Each time he could find something wrong. His brows pinched too much. His eyes didn't quite match the sunny smile. It was too crooked to be happy or too perfect to be real. He could always find something wrong with it. No matter how hard he tried to change it, it was never just right. For every problem fixed, two new flaws only appeared.

He lifted his lips into what was supposed to be a sunny smile, only to end up with a sneer. He took in the sharp teeth and scared lips, humorlessly laughing at the poor attempt at friendly and 'nice' he

made.

"Oh Grandmother, what big teeth you have," he said sardonically, staring at his reflection.

His reflection stared back at him, **"The better to eat you with, my dear."** it replied.

—

They had two weeks until their next expedition. The expedition was a small one. Establish a supply base along the Shiganshinan path - as the route between the Maria breach and wall Rose had been taken to being called - to make further expeditions easier. Simple goal, difficult execution. Ever since the fall of Maria scouting expeditions had shifted from exploring the world outside the walls and conducting research to finding a path back to the breach and hopefully repairing the wall.

It was a foolish mission. A suicide run. No one really had hope that they'd actually accomplish their mission. The dream of one day reinhabiting Maria seemed far off and impossible. Still, the Scouts tried anyway.

With only two weeks until the mission, the Scouts were in overdrive to prepare. Most of preparation consisted of ordering supplies, delivering them, packing, and planning. For Techno's part, he mostly helped with the physical aspect of preparation, but would attend the strategic meetings too, mostly sitting in a corner carving, but occasionally chiming in.

"The hardest part will be construction," Erwin explained, "We're not building the supply base from scratch, but using the ruins of an old Scout outpost as the base. We stopped by it on previous expeditions, but we're not sure how deep the damage runs in terms of repairs. On top of that we'll need to construct a few extra structures so that it can fully be used as a supply base."

"Stables, I'm guessing. Maybe a barn as well," Levi said.

"And a lookout tower." Erwin continued, "It's better to have a high vantage point when in titan territory."

Techno turned over the carving in his hand. The meeting had been going on for hours at this point - mostly discussing the route they were taking and the expenses - and he'd had plenty of time to work on it. It was a vulture, leaping into the air during flight. Techno moved his knife slowly across the wood, carving into the delicate wings and forming the outstretched feathers.

"How are we going to defend it while construction is going on?" Levi asked.

"That's where it gets difficult," Erwin rolled out a map outlining the terrain, "It's mostly flat plains with forests to the south. We can have fewer scouts posted to the plains, with more on watch around the forest. The ones in the forest are more hidden, so extra pairs of eyes are important."

"We're doing this during the day?" Hange asked, "Only five percent of titans have the ability to stay awake at night. It would be a lot safer to work then."

Erwin shook his head, "Not only would that hinder construction, but it would make us unable to see if a titan is coming. If one of those five percent find us, we're going to take a lot more damage than if a few come after us during the day."

Levi nodded, "My squad can take the prairie watch. Even with fewer of us, we're more skilled. The rookies can team up on the forest titans."

Techno frowned, continuing to carve the wings without looking up, "No. We shouldn't do that. It creates a breach in the defense."

Erwin looked over to him, "Elaborate."

"If we have lookouts that are stationed to watch and kill titans, and a titan shows up. What do you think they're going to do? Right, they'll kill it when in range. Now you've got two or three of your lookouts occupied and it leaves a hole in our defense. If another titan comes along, we're screwed."

He put too much pressure on the longer feathers, snapping the wooden tips clean off. It was like he had clipped the flights, "Damn."

Erwin took a second to think about what he'd said, "So we create a position specifically for killing titans," he decided, "A sort of offensive squadron. three for prairie, north, west, and east, and one for the forest in the south. Lookouts will alert them to a titan, and the offensive squad will take them out. The lookouts remain at their post as defense."

"Three people to a squad should do it." Levi said.

"Hange and I will be overseeing construction," Erwin looked to Levi, "A clear leader per squad would be most advantageous. Any recommendations?"

"I'll take the Northern squadron, with Gunther and Oulo." Levi answered, "Mike is on Eastern, Eld's a good leader and can take western, Petra would be best for southern, as she's good at teaching and handling new recruits. The forest is the best operating environment for ODM gear, and would be a good place for them to learn."

"And what of our wildcard?" Hange asked.

All eyes shifted to Techno, he shifted uncomfortably.

"Keep him stationed at Southern, but not strictly tied to the squadron there," Levi said, "He's good with kids, and can keep the new recruits from getting themselves killed. Petra is kind, but she's new to leadership. He can step in as needed. Similarly, if Eastern or Western squadrons are struggling he can help them out."

"Sounds like a plan," Techno observed the wooden vulture. Its feathers were clipped, and it would never be able to fly now. Yet, fly the vulture did. Successfully or not, Techno couldn't tell. But the vulture was leaping into the sky, regardless if its wings would keep it from falling. He wondered if its wings would let it fly. He knew the wings wouldn't.

He hoped the vulture would fly anyway.

—

Oulo stumbled, the box in his hands almost sliding out from his fingers before he caught it again. Damn draft horse. Damn broken yoke.

The wagon carrying their new blades had broken down after a snake had spooked the horse, who broke the yoke and snapped its reins. Now the scouts had to carry the boxes filled with metal blades themselves. Again, damn draft horse. Damn broken yoke.

He continued to shuffle slowly forward, the box making his steps difficult.

"Need any help with that?" A voice asked.

Oulo scowled, recognizing it as that new recruit. The weird one. "No."

There was a hesitant pause, "Are you sure?"

Oulo took another unsteady step forward, "Yes."

Techno walked up beside him, carrying his own box of blades with ease, "It wouldn't be any trouble, I promise."

Damn arrogant, stupid, annoying, presumptious man. No. He did not need help. He was *fine.*

"The only thing bothering me right now," Oulo growled, "Is *you.*"

"I-" Techno said, taken back by the hostility. He took a moment to find his words, "okay."

Then he walked away. Easily, without stumbling or slowing down. Oulo scoffed.Damn draft horse, damn yoke, damn Technoblade.

—

Techno watched as an arrow bounced off of his chestplate. It was set leaning up against the table about ten meters away from the bow. Sparks flew off as it hit, but the arrow ricocheted off the armor without leaving a scratch.

Hange whistled, "That's some crazy metal."

"It does have a name, you know," Techno said.

"Netherite sounds like a made up name."

"All names are made up, Squad Leader," Moblit dismissed.

Hange whined, "you're supposed to be on *my side* Moblit!"

Moblit smiled smugly. Techno laughed.

Hange looked down at their list and scribbled down some notes. They'd been at this for half an hour now, with little success. The paper at their fingertips read:

Standard Blade - Ineffective, no damage

Iron Axe - Ineffective, no damage

Granite scratch test - null

Iron scratch test - null

Gold scratch test - null

Throwing a Big Ass Rock - Ineffective, no damage

Longbow, 30m - Ineffective, no damage

Longbow, 20m - Ineffective, no damage

And now

Longbow 10m - Ineffective, no damage

"You know," Techno said, "I could have told you all this."

Hange waved at him dismissively, a grin on their face, "Now where's the fun in that? Come on gang, let's find the next thing to throw at this magic-metal."

"Netherite," Moblit corrected.

"Notersmite." Hange said.

"Netherite."

"Nethortight."

Techno shrugged, "Eh close enough."

"Close as we're going to get," Moblit agreed.

Hange ignored them and flipped through their notes, mumbling to themselves.

They watched as Hange sifted through the pages, flashes flashing and small giggles bubbling up. Moblit and Techno stood there in silence, waiting for Hange to say something. After a few minutes of waiting for direction and getting none, Moblit decided to break the awkward silence between him and Techno.

"So, uh, what was it like in your world Techno?" He asked. Techno had told them a little, enough to understand the basics of his world and form a base to experiment off of. They didn't really know anything about the rest of it.

"You're going to have to be more specific than that." Techno chuckled.

"Whatever you think is more interesting," he said awkwardly.

"Well," Techno said slowly, "It was a lot bigger than everything here. There were continents, giant bodies of land hundreds of times bigger than the walls, and oceans between them, like giant salty lakes that stretched on forever. There were kingdoms on each continent, sometimes hundreds of them. From palaces and farms there were people and life everywhere."

"I wonder if that was what the world was like before titans," Moblit said.

"Is that why you joined the scouts, Moblit? To find out?"

Moblit laughed softly, "No. Nothing as grand as that. I actually joined for them," he nodded his head towards Hange, who was cackling as they scribbled down something on a piece of paper.

"I met Hange in cadet training. Originally I wanted to go into the Military Police, and work with homicide investigations in Sina. Read a lot of books about that kind of stuff when I was young. Then I met Hange, and was enamored. They were so much more exciting than any book I'd ever read," he smiled, then his face fell back to dark seriousness, "and I knew they would end up getting themselves killed within a day without me."

Techno thought back to Lecter, "yeah makes sense."

"Why'd you join the Scouts Techno?" Moblit asked.

"Levi," Techno answered easily, "I promised him I'd do it." he grinned, "and I knew he would end up getting himself killed without me. It's a miracle he's lasted three years."

"Sounds like we've got similar stories."

"Mhm."

Hange stared at a paper for half a minute before tossing it away.

"What do you think is out there Techno?" Moblit asked eventually, "Beyond the walls."

"I don't know," Techno answered honestly, "That's one of the most important things life has taught me. How much you don't know."

"Hange would love to hear that. That means there's more to discover. A lifetime still would never be enough."

"Or several. Even hundreds in, I'm still clueless."

Moblit laughed, "What do you mean-" he stilled, then turned wide-eyed to Techno, "Techno how old are you?" he asked slowly.

Oh yeah he'd forgot to tell them, he probably should, "Twelve-thousan-"

"HEY HAVE WE TRIED SHOOTING THE ARMOR WITH A GUN?!" Hange shouted.

Moblit did not move his shell shocked eyes off of Techno's face, "no, Squad Leader."

"I'm gonna go find a gun!" Hange screamed and ran off.

Moblit was still staring at him, "okay, Squad Leader."

Hange was gone before Techno even had the chance to ask what a gun was. Seriously, people got confused when he talked about enchantment or netherite, but they threw around strange terms all the time as well.

Moblit's eyes flickered across Techno's form. He was searching for something, though Techno didn't know what. Maybe it was some sign of age, a collection of wrinkles, or greying hair, or something beyond the late twenties he appeared to be. Maybe it was a hint of a lie. Proof that Techno was just messing with him somehow. All Moblit could see was a tired, young man.

Techno smiled at Moblit, "Bit shocking, isn't it?"

He blinked slowly, "Impossible, morelike."

"And you believed I'm from another universe?" Techno questioned, "I feel like that's the more crazy one."

Moblit would not quit staring at him, "A side effect of being around Hange."

"So you believe it?"

"Give me five minutes, and yes."

Five minutes later, one gun and one Hange stronger, Moblit was still staring at him. His eyes bored into Techno's, not even really seeing him anymore. Just zoning out, his eyes happening to be pointed at his face. It felt like an eternity had passed in those five minutes.

Then, softly "Sweet Maria you're twelve-thousand years old."

He was *still* staring at Techno.

Hange, apparently, did not care enough about existential crisis' to stop science for them, snapping, "Moblit stop contemplating how meaningless our lives are and help me shoot this mystery metal!"

Hange fiddled with the gun, not the most familiar with its mechanics. They couldn't seem to open the chamber to load it and were growing more frustrated by the second, "Goddess damn it I forgot how tricky these are," they muttered.

Hange let out a groan of agitation before pulling the barrel to eye level and staring straight down it.

"Squad Leader!" Moblit shouted, snapping from his stupor. He rushed forward and snatched the gun away from Hange before they could hurt themselves. He proceeded to load the gun properly, slow and articulate, as someone might do to teach a small child. He explained as he went as well, using the slowest, simplest words he could muster. Hange wasn't paying any attention.

Just as soon as he was done, Hange snatched the gun from him and aimed at the chestplate.

Techno watched with interest as they took aim, "You know, I have been wondering what exactly that is."

Hange closed one eye and straightened their posture, "It's a gun. Keep up Cadet."

"Repeating the name does not help." He replied flatly, "What does it *do?"*

Moblit, still in the child-wrangling mindset he adopted around Hange, said, "It shoots things good."

Hange found their aim, finger drawing close on the trigger. In a blast of light and crack of sound, the gun went off. It was like the fastest bow Techno had ever seen. He couldn't even see the arrow fly before it collided with his chestplate in an explosion of sparks.

He gaped.

Hange nodded, self satisfied, "See? It shoots things good."

No kidding.

Moblit ran over to the chestplate, checking it for damage. He lifted it up, putting the gleaming metal on display. Even from ten meters away, Techno could see the gray scratch that cut across the plating like a jagged scar.

Hange jumped up in the air and whooped, "Haha! Science triumphs over magic!" they paused, "oh, and sorry for damaging your priceless armor."

Techno shot them a grin, "Oh, you are absolutely going to *love* mending."

—

There was a hesitant knock on Erwin's door.

Erwin looked up from the paper he was writing on - still with charcoal - he was checking the expenses for the expedition and making sure it fit the budget. So far so good. They would even have a little to spare, just by a hair. Really nothing, but more than usual. They could by a luxury. A luxury like ink, maybe.

"Come in," Erwin said.

Petra pushed the door open, a shy expression on her face. "Sorry to bother you, sir."

"What is it, Petra?" He asked.

"A snake spooked one of the draft horses, and it broke its yoke and reins. The soldiers were forced to carry the blades that it was pulling. Oulo dropped his crate of swords, and it spooked another horse. It reared back and broke the front of his wagon."

Erwin did quick mental math. They would have to replace a new wagon. If they did that, predicting the cost of deaths on the expedition then. . .

Erwin sighed.

No more ink budget.

—

Dinners in the scouts were a noisy affair. Unlike breakfasts - which were slow and quiet - dinners were chaotic and loud. The dining hall simply echoed with sound. There were shouting voices, rolling dice, plates and silverware clinking together, the shuffling of cards, just a symphony of sound.

Techno reveled in it. When he was in the Empire, the family dinners started out like this, before fading to cold and quiet, then Pogtopia brought it back, before he was once again alone in his snowed-in cabin. Then the forest, total isolation. Levi brought back sound. Then the kids brought him life. Diners with the 104th were bright and loud and *lovely.*

And Techno missed it.

It was bittersweet in a way. He loved the sound, but it reminded him of what he lost.

It also reminded him how alone he was. Techno was not part of that noise. It was like a composer forgot to write his part in. First Violin lay silent.

It became no more apparent than at dinner how far Techno stood apart from the Scouts. He was not one of them. He did not wear a green cape, he wore a red one. He wasn't from the walls, he had lived lifetimes never knowing them. He was not like them. He was different.

Isolation was a familiar feeling. To the point it became normal until this strange world had stolen him away. It felt weird to have it back.

Some dark part of his mind whispered to his consciousness, *it will never leave.*

Techno stared at the man stuck in his water cup. He furrowed his brows, he knew - he always knew - this was his fault. The reflection smiled at him, eyes flashing dark. Techno blinked, and he was staring at himself again.

He scowled, "Damn prissy god."

He wasn't alone. He had Levi. He had the kids. He had the 104th.

He,

had, the kids. He *had* the 104th.

His fingers clenched around his water glass, trying to conceal the ways his hands shook. He wasn't alone, he reminded himself. He wasn't. He wouldn't be. He did have Levi, that was true. He did have his kids, even separated as they were. He wasn't alone.

Why did it feel like he was, then?

—

He was struck across the nose. It's only another token to the trophy case of wounds his body is now. The blow causes blood to rush down his face, dripping from his lips and chin, painting his bruised skin poppy red.

Another hit landed, a boot crashing against his ribcage with a sickening 'crack'. Pain, even dreamlike and loose, laces across his body. A cruel sense of embroidery, pain, blood, and bruises sewn into his skin as burning embellishments. A brand, almost.

Another kick found his stomach. He groaned as it landed, the pain slipping past his lips.

"Hurts, does it?" *the cruel god asked.*

He grinned with blood stained teeth, voice hoarse, "Hardly."

His head flew back from another blow.

"Insolent," *it said.*

Techno lifted his head, still smiling, lip split and bleeding. He looked the god up and down, smirking only growing, "Ugly." he returned.

He is left broken and bleeding by the time the night is over.

—

Techno sat up in his bed, chest heaving. Damn nightmares. Damn god.

He could still feel the pain all across his body, a sort of phantom ache. His nose hurts, his ribs hurt, and his fucking lip hurt.

Something hot trickled down his face. A hand ghosted over his lips, fingers coming away red and wet. Confused, Techno continued to feel along his face. His fingers traced the lines of his nose and lips, pausing when they came to an abrupt dip near the corner of his mouth.

His lip was split. Badly.

He must've bit it in his sleep.

Techno shrugged, got up, and continued with his day.

—

Techno and Levi ate weird. It was just a simple fact, the way they interacted with their food was strange. Well, it wasn't really the way they interacted with food, more the way they interacted with each other when around food.

It was common knowledge in *any* branch of the Military - whether it be the estranged scouts, the rowdy garrison, or the stuck up MPs - that if you stole someone's food during a meal they had every right to absolutely deck you in the face. You wouldn't even get written up for it either. Once, at a formal dinner, Commander Pixis had ended up punching Commander Dok because the latter had accidentally eaten Pixis' dessert. The Commander never got in trouble for it.

It was normal practice to leave someone else's food well enough alone, unless you were close to them and knew they wouldn't be upset. It was even more taboo to steal a commanding officer's food. Although, that one was just common logic.

Levi in particular had always been protective of his food - old anxiety from living in the underground. He could still remember how starvation felt - and never allowed even his closest friends to even joke about stealing it from him. The captain was just like that. Crass, hard, intimidating.

Levi and Techno broke all these rules. Levi would swipe something from Techno's plate or vice versa. Neither protested. It happened all the time, almost always multiple times a meal. But more often than not, they would be seen *sharing* their food. Giving it up willingly. Techno would slip a piece of bread onto Levi's plate, and a minute later Levi would be seen giving a slice of ham back.

They didn't even think about it. It wasn't a transaction of 'If I give you, will you give me. . .' it was subconscious. They would be engaged in full conversation and mindlessly give or take some food.

To the two of them, this action made perfect sense. It had started when they were stranded outside the walls, sitting around a campfire eating whatever they could find. Techno had always pressed Levi to eat more, pushing extra food into his hands, trying to ensure a speedy recovery. Levi in turn retaliated, not wanting to take an uneven share. They just got so used to giving each other food that taking it too became second nature.

It was an old habit. A tender, gentle one. Something the Scouts had never seen from their captain and had never expected from this forigne, dangerous man.

It really wasn't out of place to call it odd. Not when it defied everything the Scouts knew about those two men.

—

Techno dodged the syringe shoved at him.

"You are insane!" He shouted at Hange, who was currently trying to get a blood sample from him.

Hange just laughed at him and continued their attack, "Thanks for the compliment!"

—

They watched him warily, even now. The eyes of the scouts followed each step he took, each breath he drew, each movement he made. It had been a week and a half, and they still watched him. It wasn't a long time. He knew that. It would be crazy to expect anyone to adjust to Techno's presence, let alone be comfortable with it within a week and a half. It made sense that Moblit and Hange had, as in retrospect, they were as crazy as him.

It didn't hurt so much as it reminded him what he already knew. He could feel their gaze on him at all times, eyes sliding over his skin like a knife. Carving into him with a simple glance. Their judgment passed like the ring of a toll bell and a guillotine slotting into place.

You don't belong here, their eyes said.

Ah, but what did he care? He asked himself that a lot. Why did he care what these strangers thought?

It wasn't about what they thought, he supposed. Not really. It was just a painful reminder to him. A reminder that no matter where he went, he was the odd one out, the exception, the abnormal. The monster among humans. He would never really fit. No matter how hard he tried.

And to an extent, they were correct. He didn't belong. He doubted he ever would.

Techno pulled his cloak tighter around his shoulders, trying to stave off the cold chill of watching eyes. The cloak was tattered and nothing more than a scrap of fabric at this point. It had served him through the years, and suffered greatly for it. He wondered if he should just grab a green Scout one. He wondered if he would be allowed to.

It didn't matter, he reminded himself. It didn't matter what he thought, or what they thought. Even if they never got used to him, he would continue with his goal. The one he set out when he first met the Scouts, out on the edge of a forest, in the middle of a slaughter. He was going to save lives. As many as he could. He was going to kill enemies, like a blade pointed at a neck, he could cut them down.

And hopefully, if he survived this too, he would win the war he waged. On a boat, fleeing from a burning, bleeding city. He was going to ruthlessly rid the world of monsters.

It seemed, he remarked ruefully, that the only monster he could never quite get rid of was himself.

The stares hurt. He could deal with it. If he could save some lives, if he could *help* them, he could put up with anything.

—

Levi looked over the clearing. They were going to set up another Squad four tent before Techno, Moblit, and Hange and decided to claim it as theirs for their wack ass experiments. It had quickly devolved from actual science to either messing with Moblit, or just doing random stuff for shits and giggles.

Now though, he saw Techno, shirtless, doing pushups while Moblit and Hange sat to the side, not paying attention. Moblit was reading a book, 'The name of the Wall Rose' the spine read. Hange was just scribbling something down on a piece of paper. Techno, meanwhile, was drenched in sweat, and each new push up seemed to take just a bit more strain.

"You know," Levi started, walking towards the group, "I was under the impression you were supposed to be doing science."

Hange scratched something down onto their parchment, "We *are* doing science."

"Making Techno do a few push ups doesn't really seem like science to me."

Techno cut in, breathless, "A *few* push ups," he heaved a breath, "Is very reductive."

Levi blinked, gaze snapping back to Hange, accusatory, "How long has he been at this?"

Hange looked down at their paper, "Three hours."

Levi laughed, lazily smiling down at Techno, "Ha! My record's four."

Techno scowled, continuing the exercise with renewed vigor.

That night, when the Scouts sat for dinner, Techno stumbled into the room, and crashed into his seat beside Levi. He was completely tuckered out, each movement made as if his limbs were made of lead, or stuck in tar, even now, he still couldn't seem to catch his breath.

Techno reached for his food, a tired smile creeping up on his face. He stole Levi's roll of bread, bit into it, grinned, and said, "My record's five."

—

One day until the expedition. Tensions were running high.

A fight broke out among the new recruits, some off handed comment gradually evolving into front faced insults and blatant taunts. One thing led to another and they had two greenhorns trying to rip each other's throats out.

Techno pushed through the circle of people surrounding them. His ears were filled with jeers, cheering and encouraging shouts. The people around him were alight with excitement, mouths twisted into ugly smiles and eyes alight with danger and joy. Damn spectators. This wasn't a pit fight.

He reached the center, pulling apart the two combatants who still tried to claw at eachother even as he separated them.

"Please," He hissed at them, "Do you want to cause a casualty before the expedition even begins?" He pushed them both away, sending them stumbling in opposite directions.

"Stay out of this, cadet!" Angry person one shouted. He drew his sword, and started to charge at his opponent.

Techno drew his own blade, disarming them in a quick strike. "Calm down," he tilted his head back, eyes calm and cruel, "This is not the time to be fighting."

Angry person two sneered at him, "This isn't you place Blade."

"My job is to keep the mortality rate down," Techno snapped, "so this is exactly my *place."*

Their hand twicthed on their hilt.

Techno caught the movement, giving a mocking smile, "Go ahead. Try it. I can assure you that's a fight you don't want to pick."

They 'tsk'ed and backed off, hand leaving their weapon, "Fuck you. Both of you assholes."

"What did you say?!" Angry person one shouted.

Techno held them back before they could try something stupid. He glared at both of them, "Not helping."

"Oh so you think you can just barge in here and start ordering people around?!" Angry person one spat, "You have no right!"

Through the crowd murmurs of agreement could be heard. Anger bubbled up deep in Techno. Techno did not want to hear about his authority to stop a fight, especially not from these glorified grade schoolers who stood by and egged it on. He had always hated the audiences who watched pit fights.

"I have every right," Techno said lowly, voice cold and dangerous, "and if you don't back down, I will execute that right as I see fit."

They scowled, but took a step back.

Techno raised his voice, projecting to the crowd, "Does anyone else have any conflicts they feel like airing today? I would be more than pleased to put an end to them." the venom was thick in his tone, "With titans trying to kill us, do we really have the time to be so *shit*- brained as going around killing each other!?"

After a brief moment of silence he screamed in frustration, "SHUT UP CHAT!"

With that, he stalked out of the crowd, a visible darkness and danger fallen over him. People parted around him, not wanting to be caught in the crossfires of that anger.

In the silence left in Techno's wake, a distant, *"Honestly! Children! All of you!"* could be heard.

—

Levi sat in the corner of Techno's room, mending a shirt. He'd never let his skill at sewing slip since their days in the forest. In fact, he'd only improved at it. Now it wouldn't be a lie to say he was much better than Techno had ever been.

Techno was positioned hunched over his bed, carving something or other. He didn't seem particularly mindful of the woodshavings he was getting everywhere - the floor, the bed, his lap, even in his hair - but Levi wasn't inclined to mention it. With the stormcloud above his friend's head, he didn't think it would be a good idea.

"Heard there was a fight today," he said instead, "you seem upset about it."

Techno drove his knife through the wood, "don't like fights," he grumbled.

"Seems a bit contradictory, given our shared profession," Levi pointed out.

"We wage wars Levi," wood carvings fell onto the blanket, "we fight battles. We have enemies and armies to face down. We don't stage borderline pit fights over nothing. I don't mind violence levi. I hate senselessness."

"They're being punished," Levi offered.

"Good," Techno said gruffly, "A military has no place for stuff like that. If they wanted to kill each other they could have waited until *after* the expedition. Or at least done it where someone wouldn't see it. I mean, how hard is it to not create a spectacle out of your personal drama?"

"You do realize that *your* personal drama involves a god, living inside your head, constantly making you try to kill people, and has a nasty habit of dragging everyone around you into the mess that it's created?"

Techno glared at him.

Levi raised his hands in surrender, "Right, shutting up."

—

Today was the day. What did Wilbur always like to say? It was 'do or die'. That expression had always fit well with Wil. He was a man of action, his personality not lending well to indecisiveness or change. He had opinions that were set in stone, and actions that followed. When he made up his mind, nothing would change it. It was always do or die. To him at least.

-the castle was beautiful, even at night. With its crystalline chandeliers extinguished and the candles put out, the beautiful building was left cold and dark, similar to the icy landscape it called home. Even in the dark, the castle shone. With the light of the moon and her stars, the castle came truly alive. Silver embellishments and quartz floors shimmering like a million diamonds.

It was also silent. The kind of silence left after an orchestra finishes their final piece. That breathtaking, passive silence. One single second that hangs in the air, while the audience remembers to breathe, and decides the fate of the musicians; will they rise to applause, or fall to hissing boos?

Two men stand in the hallway. One dressed in layer upon layer of finery, the other in simple yellow jacket and brown trousers. The only indicator of his royalty is the silver crown perched on his head.

"Don't go Wilbur," the fine man pleaded. His voice is soft as the fall of silence that follows.

They stare at each other, tense and longing. They can't find the words to fill the space. They don't think there will ever be enough words to convey what needs to be said. When Wilbur was young, he would make up words when he couldn't find the right ones. No, that flower wasn't aureolin, he would insist, it was 'sunsweet'. No, he wasn't sad, he was 'commetarial'. He would rather be a million shooting stars falling to earth, losing their place above, before he would even consider using the word 'sad'. It just fit right. Why try to find the right words, when he could make them himself?

But Wilbur wasn't a child anymore. He knew he couldn't just 'make up' solutions to his problems. He had to act. He had to work within confines, not ignore them, if he was to escape them.

A single tear slipped from a brown eye. A red one followed suit, streaking down a pale face, like a shooting star across satin night. Commetarial indeed.

"I'm sorry," Wilbur said, "I'm sorry I can't stay longer. I wish things were different, Techno."

Techno steadied his resolve, taking a step forward, "They could be. We could change things. You wouldn't have to go. You wouldn't have to leave us, you wouldn't have to leave Tommy. We can fix this."

Wilbur simply shook his head, "No, we can't. It's far too late to change."

"Please," he begged, face stoic, heart bleeding, "please don't."

"Tell Tommy I love him," Wilbur smiles, turning.

"Tell him yourself!" Techno is cracking. Slowly and all at once, "You can still be his family."

Wilbur looked at him for a long while, "Family," he said. Slowly, he took the crown from his head, staring at the jewel encrusted silver. His eyes don't see it, they see something else. Something far away, something close.

Wilbur raised his eyes, meeting Techno's. "Techno, no matter where I go, or what I do, I will always be his family. I will always be yours." he lets the crown slide from his fingers, "I just can't be a part of this *family. This family that tears itself apart, from the inside out. I can't do it to myself anymore. I can't do it to Tommy anymore."*

The crown hit the floor, shattering. Delicate silver snapped, and a diamond dislodged, flying to Techno's feet.

He picked it up, studying the small jewel. Such a fragile, beautiful thing. It looked as breakable as glass and weak as its wearer. But, Techno knew both could be forged into the most incredible, strong armor. He smiled at it, and let a solemn tear fall.

"Goodbye, Wilbur," he said, tossing the gem to the boy, "and good luck."

Wilbur caught it, looked down at it, and smiled softly at him, "Goodbye, Techno."

Then he was gone, and Techno was alone. All that's left of his brother is memories and a broken crown. Techno kneeled to the floor, gathered it in his hands, and cried. Techno was breaking, slowly and all at once-

Techno shook the memory from his head. Why did he always have to remember things like that at the worst possible times? He should be focused on literally anything else right now. He was about to head out into a literal war, he needed all of his attention on that. Not some old, sad memory.

The Scouts had awoken absurdly early in the morning. They had to grain the horses early if they wanted to set out at sunrise. Dawn and dusk were the best times to move in titan territory, there was enough light to begin to see, but most titans were not yet awake.

Now, at four in the morning, the world was still very much dark. Dark and cold, much like the sky had been on that fateful night. The stars were so bright against the black ice of the heavens. Wilbur had left early too, just before sunrise. It was symbolic in a way. Sunrises were the beginning of something new, but they were also the end of the night.

Techno 'tsk'ed and focused his attention back on his task. No matter how hard he tried, he just couldn't seem to forget.

Carl nudged his palm, getting aggravated with how long this was taking.

Techno laughed, "Sorry bud, got caught in the past" he poured the grain into Carl's bucket, "There you go."

Carl attacked his food with abandon, inhaling it as quickly as he could. Minuit whinnied impatiently and tried to nibble at Carl's bucket. She'd yet to be grained. Guess Levi didn't love his horse or something. What a terrible guy.

A hand pushed Minuit's face away from Carl's feed, "No bad horse," Levi reprimanded, pouring her a can of grain, "You fatty," he said, smiling gently as she gobbled her own food down.

"She's going to be doing a lot of work today," Techno pointed out, "She'll burn it off."

"She better. Unless she's planning on leaving me in titan territory like last time," Minuit bit at him, "See? She's a bitch?"

"Takes one to know one," Techno chirped back.

"Ah, so that explains why you ride the fucking demon horse."

Techno rolled his eyes, "He's not that bad."

"Is that why he tried to trample that one stable boy to death? All for what? Cuz he didn't fucking feed him on time? He's a fucking asshole to everybody."

"Which is why I'm surprised you two don't love each other," Techno said, "You have so much in common."

"No, I'm mean," Levi deadpanned, "He's a little bastard who likes terrorizing people."

Techno checked over his tack, making sure everything was good to go, "Pot, kettle." he paused, "wait aren't you literally a bastard?"

"Not the point," Levi said quickly, "I'm just saying that Carl's a dick."

"He has standards," Techno corrected, "It's not *his* fault no one meets them."

"No one except you."

"Who wouldn't love me?" Techno asked, "I mean, just look at me. I'm amazing."

"Could do without the narcissism."

"Could do without the sass."

Levi ran his hands down Minuit's dark neck, finger's gliding slowly over the silky fur. His expression slowly shifted to somber and serious, "Are you ready for this Techno?"

"Am I ready for what?" he asked.

Levi gestured around him to the stables, where the scouts were graining, grooming, and tacking up, "all this. Today." he looked at the Scouts, "Are you ready to return here tomorrow and look at this crowd and have to pick out the missing people?"

Techno sighed, hands falling from Carl's nose to his side, "No," he said, "I'm not. I never am."

Levi ran a hand through his hair, "and yet we do it anyway."

"We do."

"Here's to fighting a fight you shouldn't have fought," Levi said.

He smiled, sad, "Here's to surviving," Techno finished.

A star shot across the sky. Commetarial.

—

Techno swept through the now empty stables. The Scouts were about to depart, and final checks were in place. Most Scouts were looking over the wagons to make sure everything was there or checking their own tack. Levi had sent Techno to make sure no one was left behind.

Occasionally a Scout would try to desert, or a new recruit would simply get confused and not know they were supposed to be leaving now. Apparently Techno was 'scary enough looking that it would stop someone from trying to escape him' at least according to Hange and Levi. Who was Techno to say no? He'd already checked the living quarters and the mess hall, now all that was left was the stables.

The dark room was now bereft of the life it once had. Not even an hour ago, the halls were filled with Scouts, speaking in low hushed tones as they finished saddling and mounting.

Now though, it was nothing but silence and shadows.

A small sniffle cut through the stillness.

Techno turned towards the sound, finding a single scout, with his back pressed to the wall, head buried in his knees. It was one of the new recruits, though Techno couldn't remember his name. Techno felt a twinge of sympathy. This was a literal child. Just fifteen, and he was joining a suicide mission. The Scout mortality rate was abhorrent, but the new recruit's rate was worse. Eight out of ten died. Two survived. Just two.

Most recruits didn't think about it. Their minds were flooded with the propaganda they saw, the glory of it all, the idea of freeing humanity. Idealistic. Like Eren, but they'd never seen first hand what titans could do.

For this kid though, the idea must've just set in. He knew he was probably going to die.

At fifteen, eaten alive by a literal monster.

"Hey kid," Techno's voice was loud in the silence, echoing between the stable walls. The recruit's head jerked up, eyes wet and fearful. Techno put on his best comforting smile, "We're waiting on you."

"I-I'm sorry I-I'll be right there," he tried to get up, but his legs and arms felt frozen. He fell back down, shaking.

Techno sighed and approached him.

The kid's eyes blew wide. Dread seeped across his features. He tried to scramble up again, only to fail and fail, "I'm sorry. I-I'm sorry. I-"

"Shut up," Techno sat down next to him, leaning back on the stable wall, "Just sit back down."

The kid stared at him, face frozen, but he did as he was told, relaxing back against the wall.

"What's your name, kid?" he asked.

"Luke Cis, sir," he said, voice still shaky.

"Don't call me sir," Techno said, "Makes me sound old. Plus, I'm not a superior officer, I haven't even officially graduated from the academy."

"A-Alright."

Techno hummed, staring off into the dark, "Are you afraid, Luke?"

"No," Luke tried to deny, "No I'm not!"

Techno cut him off with a tired stare, "Truthfully, Luke."

Luke swallowed and looked away, "Yes."

"Why?" Techno asked.

"I think you can answer that," Luke chuckled nervously, "I-I'm going to die. Aren't I?"

Techno thought about it, "Maybe," he decided.

"There's an 80% chance I will," Luke said, "I've seen the statistics."

Techno nodded, "Sounds pretty damning doesn't it?"

Luke laughed, "My mom's gonna have to mourn me. Dad's gone. I'm her only son. She'll have no one left after I die."

"Maybe," Techno said. After a moment of silence, he continued, "I'm afraid too."

"Why?" Luke asked, "The commander said you survived almost a year in titan territory. You'll be fine," he looked at his hands, "I just went through basic training. I graduated at the bottom of my class. I'm just cannon fodder."

"Maybe," Techno said, "But then again, maybe not."

Luke looked at him hopelessly, the question clear in his eyes. 'What do you mean maybe not?'

Techno sighed again, so much for ignoring his past, "I was once cornered by a man. I was injured, without armor or my weapons. The only thing I had on me was a pickaxe. But the man? Oh, he had every advantage. He was strong, wearing the finest armor I'd ever seen, with even finer weapons to match. And he was *angry*. He tried to kill me." Techno laughed, "Obviously it didn't work."

He looked at Luke, "You've got everything stacked against you. You're fifteen, fighting giant man-eating monsters. It's an impossible fight. That's what everybody likes to say when they look at people like us." he stood up, "I had every odd stacked against me when I fought that man. And you know what I did?"

Luke gulped, "What?"

Techno's face was stoic, cold, "I put a pickaxe through his teeth." he offered Luke a hand up, "Now, you can go run off into the night and desert. I doubt the Scouts would care enough to find you. I'll just say you were gone before I got to the stables." he smiled, gentle and imperfect, but real, "or, you can pick up your weapon and fight. You might die, or you might just live. The choice is yours."

Luke hesitated, "I'm too scared."

"To fear is to be human," Techno said, moving his hand a little closer, "If you ever reach the day when you're without it, tell me. I'd love to learn how to do that."

"So you're really afraid?"

"I am," Techno confessed, "I'm always afraid."

And Luke took his hand. Techno just smiled, and led him to the rest of the Scouts.

—

Even as early as it was, people still made a point to see the Scouts as they left for their expedition.

The sun had barely begun to rise over the horizon, though with the walls right next to them they couldn't tell. The only thing that gave away the breaking day was the slowly lightening sky and the warming air.

Still, even in the early morning, where darkness still swathed the city of Trost, people had left their houses and gathered along the road where the scouts were. A small crowd had accumulated around them, people shuffling excitedly to try to get a look at them.

In a border city is wasn't uncommon to see the Scouts, but with the rarity of expeditions it was still a entertaining sight.

Whispers could be heard rippling through the crowd.

'Look it's Captain Levi!'

'Humanity's strongest!'

'Do you think they'll be able to reseal the wall?'

'They're the only one's brave enough to'

Some were less positive than others.

'Waste of tax dollars'

'They're just going to end up dead.'

'Only a Scout would be stupid enough to fight a titan.'

'Useless'

'Unwanted'

'Waste'

Techno tugged the hood he was wearing tighter over his face. The green fabric was soft under his fingers, and fell protectively over his body. They finally got him a new green Scout cloak instead of the red one he usually wore. No one could be able to pick up there was something different about him. No one could really see him. He was just a normal Scout, nothing more.

The whispers around him did nothing to calm the anxiety of being discovered. The crowd reminded him of Chat in many ways. Always whispering in your ear, wanted or not. Good things sometimes, bad things more often than not.

"Relax," Levi whispered to him, "They're not looking at you. You'll be okay."

"Obviously," Techno said, but continued to hunch down, "They're all looking at *you.*"

As if to accentuate his point, a young woman screamed, "Captain Levi! Marry me!"

Techno just raised a brow.

Levi sighed, "I hate people."

"I *told* you that you're a lot like Carl."

Levi huffed and looked away.

Techno just pet Carl, "You'll fend off all the scary fangirls, won't you bud? Levi could use the protection," Carl neighed. Techno turned to Levi, "Good news! He said yes. Your problems are solved."

"That fucking horse is more a danger to me than any fangirl is," Levi said dryly.

"That's not what you'll be saying when he kicks some girl trying to put a ring on your finger away."

Levi snorted, "Sure."

The Scouts came to a halt as they reached the gate. The Walls always looked higher than they really were. They were only fifty meters. They felt like a hundred, maybe a thousand. If He didn't constantly remind himself, Techno would say those walls stretched all the way up to the sky.

"Remember the plan!" Erwin screamed to the Scouts, "Don't let yourself be split from the group! Use your signals! Keep riding no matter what!"

The gate creaked open, the sound of straining chains and scraping stone filling the quiet morning air. Through the opening door, Techno could see the sun just beginning to rise. Was it a beginning or an ending, he wondered.

Erwin took a deep breath, shouting, "Charge!" as loud as he could. His voice echoed across all of Trost, bright and damning as the sun.

Horses galloped forward, carrying their riders into the sunlight.

This was it, Techno thought as he watched his comrades be bathed in gold, *It was do or die.*

—

Surprisingly, the fifty kilometer trek started off well. The first five kilometers went smoothly, with zero titan altercations. It was a long tense ride, the ten minutes passing with fear and apprehension sitting low in the stomachs of the Scouts. They knew a titan would show up eventually, and they were on high alert. Until then, they were -strangely- safe.

Of course, their good fortune could not last.

It started with a single red flare. *Titan spotted.* No big deal. They simply changed directions to avoid it.

Another minute passed with no alterations. Then, another red signal appeared. Then two, then three.

Luckily they were all towards the back of the caravan. The Scouts could just continue running forward and get away from them. Even at the horses limited speed - they couldn't fully sprint without running out of energy - they could easily outrun a walking titan.

"Looks like this'll be an easy expedition," Oulo remarked, smirking.

And of course, that's when everything went to shit. A black flare went up, dead in front of the group. *Abnormal titan spotted.* Thanks to the Levi squad being positioned at the front of the caravan, they had the lovely pleasure to see the damn thing. A fifteen meter, with abnormally long legs and lanky arms, charging full speed ahead towards them.

"Fuck you, Oulo," Gunther growled.

"What?!" Oulo exclaimed, "How is this my fault?!"

"Well things were going pretty well until you had to say the 'easy' word," Gunther gestured in front of them angrily, "and now we have a fifteen meter piece of bullshit charging at us!"

"Might only be fourteen," Petra remarked, "But still, fuck you."

"That is a complete coincidence! What? Are you going to blame me for bad luck!"

"Fuck you!"

"No, fuck you!"

"Shut the fuck up!" Levi screamed over them, immediately silencing them. "Obviosuly we can't avoid the ugly fuck, so we're going to have to kill it. Oulo, as the one who said the stupid thing, go cut it's tendons. Gunther, you're on nape duty. Techno?"

"Yeah?"

"Stop them from accidentally killing each other."

"Yessir."

"What?!" Oulo exclaimed, "I don't need to be baby sat by some greenhorn who's probably never killed a tita-"

"Shut the fuck up and go kill it!" Levi shouted, "before it gets here and I have to do it myself."

Oulo huffed, and took off full gallop towards the thing. Gunther and Techno followed close behind.

Oulo shot his wires out at the titan's left ankle. They met their mark, burying deep into the running titan's leg just as it began to lift that foot. Oulo shot forward, swooping past the ankle, blades out, and ricocheting around to the other one using his momentum from the initial move. He was a blur, his movement followed a streaky afterimage and a trail of blood.

The titan fell down into the dirt, suddenly finding both of it's achilles tendons to be severed. It's hands immediately came up to try to right itself, but before it could do anything Gunther flew across it's nape, cutting a deep wedge from it's neck. The titan stopped struggling and the body burned away.

Techno had to give it to them, they were excellent at what they did.

"Nice work," he said to Gunther. The man smiled nodding his head in thanks.

Oulo mounted his horse again, scoffing, "Maybe in a couple years you'll be able to do something like that," he sniffed condescendingly, "that is if you don't die on this expedition."

"Careful not to jinx yourself," Gunther sassed, "You seem good at it."

Oulo huffed and trotted back to the group.

Gunther climbed back on his own horse, regarding Techno with calculating eyes, "The first expedition is always the worst," he said, "Usually it's the titans that are the problem for recruits." his eyes slid over the retreating form of Oulo, "But for you I think it might be the people. It'll get better."

Techno smiled, "Careful, don't jinx it."

Gunther matched his grin, "Knock on wood, I guess."

They rode back to the group together.

—

It only got worse from there. They got hit full force on the left side of the caravan, seven normal titans, two abnormal. Even as they scattered and tried to run away, they couldn't escape the damage the titans were doing. Worse, a wagon had been stranded in the middle of it all. They wouldn't be able to accomplish their objective without it, not when it carried half of their building material.

So they couldn't leave until they were able to get it out. They had to fight their way out. The worst scenario a Scout could be caught in.

Carl raced across the open land, his hooves pounding the earth in even, strong strides. The air was thick with smoke, black and red. It stung his eyes and assaulted his nose with the harsh scent of gunpowder. It smelled like fireworks, and beneath it, blood.

Through the smoke he couldn't see the titan hand reaching for him until it was right in front of Techno. Techno launched himself from Carl, cursing. He shot his wires up the arm, flying up the appendage. His armor was heavy, but his gear was light, making him fly as fast as any Scout can humanly go.

The arm lead him to a body, one that was currently trying to shove a person in his mouth with its other hand. Techno abandoned his plans for the nape, instead changing direction and severing the titan's digits from its hand. The person fell down and zipped away with their gear.

The uninjured hand made another grab at him, and Techno danced away, using the other arm as a platform to stand on. In a clean stroke he took the entire hand off, rendering both arms useless until they regenerated.

He raced up the body. In a flash of deadly netherite and bloodstained cloth, he took the nape too.

The titan crashed to the ground, and Techno landed on top of it. He placed two fingers in his mouth, and sounded a clear, shrieking whistle.

Carl burst through the colored smoke not a moment later. Techno jumped into the saddle, and they're off again, racing through the smoke.

Another titan appeared through the smog, but it had three people working on it. They were rookies, from what Techno could tell with their clunky movement, but they would be able to handle it. A fourth was stuck in its mouth, screaming as one leg was crushed between a set of jagged teeth. Techno ignored his powerful urge to just kill the damn thing and flew straight at the mouth.

"I've got you," he said to the man as he landed on the monster's face.

"I've got you," he said as he severed the jaw muscles. In the back of his mind, he could hear Armin listing them. *"The titan jaw has five muscles that control it." Armin said, "The masseter major, masseter minor, the masseter anterior, masseter posterior and the keifer sperren."* He couldn't remember which one was the strongest or which one locked the jaw. He cut all of them.

"I've got you," he said as he pulled the bloody body from the titan's mouth.

"I've got you," he said as he stabbed out the titan's eyes -the man carried on his back- creating an opening for the other three Scouts to kill it.

"I've got you," He said as he put the sobbing, bloodied man onto Carl's back. Blood dripped slowly down the saddle, seeping into Carl's fur and pads, coating Techno's clothes and hands as he tried to stop it.

"I've got you," he said, even as his hands twitch over the blood beneath them. His mind sings gloriously at the sight. He holds the man gently, carefully, like he might break. He wanted to slit the man's pale throat. Even as he tried to help him, even as voices scream to kill.

Screams erupt in the air, from all directions, filling the battle field as thickly as smoke. He doesn't have the time to save this man. He doesn't have the attention to spare, nor the urgency to make him a top priority.

Techno tore off his green cloak, passing it to the man, "Put pressure down with this. Stop the bleeding. Stay alive." With a whistle and a smack, Techno sent Carl galloping away. Techno sprinted in the opposite direction, towards the blood and battle, while the man rode to safety.

It's a blur after that. Blood and burning bodies and steam and smoke. Through the haze, he can hear screams and shouts. He tears through titan after titan, his body engaged in a deadly dance, one wrong step sending him careening over into the great beyond. If he moves a second too late or cuts an inch too shallow he's dead.

Flower petals come upturned as he sprints through lush fields, poppy red, dandelion yellow, fairy trumpet pink.

He presses down on a wound one second, trying to staunch the bleeding. The next he is brutally maiming a titan, his laugh ringing loud in his own ears. Then he's flying over a battlefield, wind in his hair and ten fingers chasing him. He's cutting himself free from hold. He's saving a life. He's ending one. He's dancing with lady death. Waltzing across a battlefield in slowdance, then foxtrot, until his legs are giving out. He severs a leg. A titan falls. The world shakes with giant foot falls.

The battle's crescendo reaches a climax. They rise to a brisk quickstep, and suddenly they are spinning across the battlefield. Death held him in her arms, he clings tightly to her shoulders as they twirl and spin and bleed and kill.

He is fighting. He is losing. He is winning.

The air smelled like gunpowder and death. Intoxicating. Repulsing.

His hands are burning, fiery blood and blisters covering them.

The air is loud with noise, screams and screeching wire.

His breath is coming out in short, deep huffs. In, out. In, out. In, out-

He's standing atop giant bodies, watching them burn. He's holding a hand, as someone dies.

He's snapping from moment to moment, time passing in gorey snapshots, each one lodging itself deep into his soul like an arrow to the heart. Snap- Death. Snap- Life. Snap- Fighting. Snap- Running. Bleeding. Burning. Surviving. Hurting. Laughing.

Then it's over, as soon and suddenly as it had begun. It's a snap to present, a breath and a blink as he takes it in.

He's standing in a green, bloody field, as people scramble to fix the wagons and mount their horses. The injured are loaded in along with their supplies, soft groans and grunts of pain as they're shifted in to fit.

The air was silent with death, fear and dismay.

Levi trotted up to him on Minuit, trailing Carl behind while he held his reins.

"You abandoned your horse?" he hissed, "of all the stupid things do to. I know you survived without one before, but you cannot just abandon your horse in the middle of a battle you fucking idiot. Honestly, what the fuck were you thinking, shithead?"

Techno looked around the field. It was covered in blood and bodies. They don't have the time to pick them up. To take them home. To their families. They have to leave before the titans come.

Every single blade of grass is covered in blood and death, and sorrow falls in thick blankets across the prairie.

And oh, it was beautiful.

"Techno?" Levi asked, concern seeping into his tone, "Are you okay?."

He grabbed the reins from Levi, mounting Carl, "Yeah. Right. Yeah I'm fine." he muttered quickly, putting on a practiced smile, "I'm great."

Before Levi could ask any questions, Erwin signals for them to go, and they're riding off.

—

They reached their destination at midday. It had only been six hours of riding but it had left them worn and weary. They had lost four people. Four good soldiers devoured and ripped to shreds in front of their comrades. The Scouts didn't stop to mourn them, they didn't have the time. They had to continue forward. That's what the Scouts always did. Run full force ahead, and never turn to look back.

The sun was crowned atop the sky, blistering white gold that beat down on them as they worked. Wagons were unloaded quickly and camp was set up. The lookout and offensive squadrons were divided up and hurried into place, allowing for construction to begin.

The old Scout outpost was like a lot of other buildings they'd seen out in wall Maria. Crumbling. Its pillars and foundations were sagging, with part of the roof caved in and shattered windows. It was faring a lot better than many of the houses in major cities - as titans didn't care about some abandoned building, they only cared about humans - but it still needed a lot of work to get it back to full function.

The construction team got to work right away, going about their work with vigor.

Techno, for his part, sat right at the southern forest, back resting against a tree as he waited for something to happen.

The forest wasn't that different from the one Techno had once called home. The trees towered high into the sky, making the forest floor a shadowy stage filled with low brush. The main difference Techno could see was size. His forest had stretched on forever, endless as the sky, but this one was small and young, trapped by the confines of the walls.

Techno let his gaze roam across the ground and canopy, searching for any signs of hostiles. He couldn't find anything besides the young Scouts, zipping around the trees as they fell into position.

Above, he could hear Petra's guiding words of encouragement and direction to the new recruits. For as soft as her tone was, he could hear the strength beneath each syllable. She was teaching them how to survive, her words were their lifeline. They'd made it through the first part of the expedition. That was luck. They'd need more to make it after that.

No amount of training could prepare them for the reality of expeditions. They had to experience it first hand. For the fledgling soldiers this was it. Do or die.

In the background he could hear the sounds of construction beginning. Sawing wood, hammering nails, metal clanking and wood scraping against wood. He could hear the shouts of Erwin and Hange as they directed the effort. How their voices blended in with creaking leather and straining chains as materials were lifted up the building's walls.

A loud roar came from behind him, at the north squadron. Seconds later a crashing boom could be heard.

The construction team only grimaced and continued their work.

Techno had to give it to them, they were brave. They were able to work single mindedly on a project while at any second a titan could come and kill them. It took dedication and discipline, and the Scouts executed it perfectly.

Techno tilted his head back, leaning it against the rough bark of the tree. Right now there were no titans approaching from the South, East or West, so he could take it easy. He knew the peace

wuldn't last however. Sooner or later, he would be called to fight.

His hand twitched over the hit of his sword. His axe was hanging loosely from his hip, heavy against his leg. It was strange, having his weapons so clean. Titan blood evaporated, leaving nothing behind on what spilt it. It didn't make sense to have his weapons black and gleaming, instead of dirty and tarnished after a battle. Some part of him itched to paint them red.

But until then, he waited.

Sooner or later, he would grace the stage of the battlefield. Whether it was cue to act or curtain call remained undecided.

—

Techno snatched a recruit away from the waiting jaws of a titan.

"Careful!" he shouted, landing on a nearby tree, still holding the recruit tight to his chest, "If I hadn't grabbed you, you'd be dead!"

"Sorry, Sir!" They shouted back, righting themselves.

He cuffed them on the back of the head, "Pay attention next time! There won't always be someone save you."

"Yes, Sir!"

Techno didn't correct them on the fact that he technically wasn't a superior officer. It seemed like a moot point at the moment, given the whole 'titan is here, people might die, someone is screaming' thing going on.

He huffed, giving their hair a quick ruffle, "Just don't get yourself killed, kid." he said before zipping off to dispatch the titan. Petra was already distracting it, cutting tendons and immobilizing

the thing. She was keeping casualties down, making sure it couldn't get to a recruit while they were scattered and panicked. It almost made it too easy for Techno. A quick flick of his sword and axe, and it was crashing to the forest floor.

—

Blood slowly steamed off his hands. Crimson dripped into the lines and crevices of his worn palms, pooling in the dips of flesh. Vapor rose in thin white wisps, tracing the erasing edges of blood spots and dancing up into the air. The red faded from his skin disappearing like it was never even there, the patches shrinking down and down until they were gone.

A drop fell from his hand, vanishing in a trail of steam before it could hit the ground.

The blood was almost alive. It spread and shrunk, oscillating between the two in a strange pattern. In, out, in, out. Almost like it was breathing. It bloomed and grew across his hands, vines of red reaching across his palm then grew to buds and flowers-

- Poppies falling into pools of blood-

-Dad? Mom?-

-why? Why? WHY WAS THIS HAPPENING-   *-Blood, slowly dying the ground red-*

-Burning. It burned-

-Oh GODS IT BURNED-

- "What do you want to be when you grow up?" his brother had asked.

He gazed up at the sky, back pressed into a bed of flowers and ferns. Green leaves and petals ticked the sides of his cheeks. They were the same flowers that grew outside of their house. Mom had taught them their names, once. Poppy for the red ones, dandelion for yellow, and fairy trumpet for pink.

His brother smiled, "I'll tell you what I want to be," he said, "I want to be a king. Like the ones mom tells us stories about at night. I want to live in a palace and eat lots of food every day and never have to work in a farm again."

The boy turned his eyes towards the sky as well, brown iris' glowing gold in the kind sun, "I want to be a soldier, like dad." he said, grinning.

"A soldier?" his brother questioned, looking at him. His eyes were brown like the boy's, only darker. Richer, like chocolate. They crinkled around the edges, when his brother smiled jokingly, "Isn't that a bit of a stretch for a scrawny eleven year old kid?"

The boy pouted, "Like a king is any better, given you're a fourteen year old farm boy."

"Oh please," he scoffed, "I could totally be a king. Dad just says they laze about all day and get drunk off wine, power, and money. I could do that easily."

"And I could fight in a war!"

His brother laughed.

"I could! I promise you I could!" he squawked, "I would be the best soldier! I would ride a white horse and wear diamond armor and kill all the bad guys with my sword!"

"Sure," his brother giggled, "if you're such a good soldier, then see if you can beat this-"

His brother descended on him, tickling his sides. The boy shrieked, laughing and howling as he tried to push his brother off him.

"St-Stop!" he laughed, "That feels funny!" His brother only tickled him harder, grinning at him. The boy swung his brother sideways and rolled them over, grass sticking to his back when he flipped them. His brother pushed him off, and tried to hold him down. The tickling devolved into playful wrestling.

"Come on little soldier!" His brother yelled, pinning his arms down, "Let's see that fighting spirit!"

The boy kicked him lightly in the stomach, forcing him off. They tussled in the grass, upturning flowers as they rolled and clawed at the ground. His brother shoved a handful of grass in his face, and the boy retaliated by shoving dirt in his.

"Come on, is that all you've got?" he asked, smiling, "You're gonna need a lot more than that if you want to be a soldier!"

They flipped again. The boy was held down, trying to squirm away from his brother. He fought and fought as hard as he could, trying to push and pry his limbs free. He grunted and strained with the effort, unable to get away.

"Come on little soldier!" His brother cried, "Come on."

He struggled.

"Come one little soldier!"

He pushed.

"Come on little soldier.

He fought.

"Come on!"-   -he was bleeding-   -shallow cut-

   -deep wound-

                  -pleas, ignored-

              -The boy stood in a pool of blood, red dripping from his hands and chin-

   -a body at his feet-   -his brother, dead-

       -He had a brother?-

-He doesn't remember a brother-

-He does-

-He doesn't-

-He does he does he does!-

-he had a brother, he had a family-   -once, not now-

-what happened to them?-   -why couldn't he- -remember- -remember-

*-REMEMBER-   **Don't**   -HE NEEDED TO REMEMBER-*

Forget!

Leave it behind

Forget!   It never happened   It's not real!

-He had to-REMEMBER-

Forget

Remember

Forget

Forget

FORGET!

-echno?"

A filtered voice drifted into his conscience. He barely registered it, mind elsewhere. His eyes stayed fixed to his hands.

He needed to forget.

"Techno!"

He snapped from his enthrallment. Petra was staring at him with a worried expression, eyebrows pinched and mouth twisted.

"Yeah?" he asked.

"The eastern squad has three titans running towards it," she explained, the worried look in her eyes not leaving, "You might want to help them out."

"Ah," he said, "Right." His mind felt-empty, almost. Like there was something he was supposed to be doing, or thinking. Like a puzzle piece was missing. It left a hole in his consciousness, a constant itch at the back of his mind, like there should be something there. He just couldn't remember what.

Techno shook his head. It didn't do any good to dwell on it. He had more important things to deal with right now. He gathered himself, wiping his hands off, checking his weapons, and preparing to jump from the tree.

Petra grabbed his arm, "Wait."

He looked back at her, an eyebrow raised in question.

"Are you sure you're alright?" she asked, "You looked pretty out of it there."

"I'm fine," he said gruffly.

Petra bit her lip, glancing away. Her voice -when it finally came- was in soft, gentle words, "Listen, Techno. Shell shock is pretty common in the scouts. Most veteran soldiers have it, probably even including the commander and the captain," Petra said, "There's no shame in it."

Techno gently tugged his arm away, "I should go. Before the titans get there."

"Techno," she tried.

"Just… Just drop it," he looked away. There was a pause, "Petra, you're a kind person. You give light so freely, so generously, to everyone and anyone" He looked back at her, his mouth in a lopsided, sad smile, "Try not to waste it on people like me."

With that, he jumped.

—

The leader of the eastern squad, Mike Zacharias, was weird. That wasn't an overstatement either. He was plain strange, and that was coming from Techno of all people.

Techno had rode up on Carl, coming to a stop and dismounting in front of the eastern squadron and their lookouts. He inclined his head towards Mike, who Techno knew was a squad leader like Levi, and fourth in the chain of command, after Erwin, Levi, and Hange. He was a figure of strength and importance in the Scouts, and it would only further Techno's isolation if Mike had any grievances with him.

For all of Techos hubris and confidence, he could be respectful. At least, when the time called for it. He had to admit, he'd grown rather callous and off putting in the years, harboring a general disregard for order and chain of command. However, despite what others may claim -cough cough, Armin and Eren, cough cough- he could be *kind*.

"Squad Leader Zacharias," he said in greeting.

Mike turned to face him, "Technoblade," he returned, "come to help with the arriving titans?"

"Yes, sir," he said, "Petra advised it."

"Ah, I see. Do you yourself think your presence is required?"

Techno glanced at the approaching titans. They were all running, all three of them abnormal. Even far as they were from the camp, at the speed they were going at they would arrive in two minutes. Or less.

"I think it couldn't hurt," Techno answered honestly.

"I see," Mike said again, taking a step towards Techno. His face came close to Techno's, dropping down to Techno's collar. Mike drew a deep breath in through his nose, grew still for a moment, then stepped stiffly away. He stared incredulous and considering at Techno. Somewhere in his eyes was a question, somewhere in his eyes was suspicion.

"Interesting," he said.

"I-" Techno broke off, "Did you just sniff me?"

One of the Scouts laughed, "First time? Mike has an extraordinary sense of smell. Has a habit of sniffing anyone he meets."

"Sir!" Another scout came in, gazing down the long neck of a spyglass, "Titans are approaching. They'll arrive in a minute! We should act now."

Mike held up a hand, silencing them, "We will remain in position. Technoblade will engage them."

The Scout with the spyglass sputtered, "I beg your pardon, sir? They'll be here soon. We need to take care of them before they reach the construction site."

"I know what you said, Anne. No need to repeat it. I am simply curious to see the capabilities of our newest recruit."

"Sir, if I may," Anne said, "If the titans break through it could jeopardize the whole mission. We would have to retreat. We could lose countless soldiers."

"If," Mike said, "If the titans break through. Technoblade, do you think you would let that happen?"

Techno set his jaw, "No, sir."

"But sir-" Anne tried.

"Quiet." Mike sent her a sharp glare, "I will be right behind Technoblade in the case that something goes wrong."

Anne bowed her head in resignation, "Yes, sir."

"Now," Mike looked at Techno and gestured to the approaching titans, "After you."

Techno remounted Carl, gave a single clipped nod to Mike, and rode away. Straight into the heart of danger, the heart of death. Already, he could hear Chat calling for his entrance, center stage.

That day would go down in Scout history. A single man, facing three abnormal titans. Their sizes varied from telling to telling, some said they were all fifteen meters, some said they were only sevens and fives, some even claimed that they reached eighteen. In the end, the details didn't matter, what mattered was what stayed consistent from each telling of the story.

Techno killed them in seconds.

Three abnormal, smart, dangerous killers, taken down like it was *nothing*. The man, angel or devil that they called him, played with the damn things. They fell beneath his blade, toppled over like dominos. As if all he had to do was push them over with the flick of his finger, then they would fall. One by one.

And perhaps, the worst part of the story. The sound.

Techno laughed through all of it. The sound cut through the air like the netherite sword he wielded, sharp and deadly. As he ripped through their flesh, his laugh echoed across the empty plains. While blood rained down in thick showers, he giggled. As death trailed him like a cape, he howled with glee.

When he returned, he simply looked down at Mike, eyes black as midnight, and asked, **"Capable enough for you, Sir?"**

Those were the stories that persisted. His skill, his danger, his laugh. For most Scouts, it was hope. Maybe they could finally have a chance. Maybe they could win. For some it was fear. What if that anger was turned on them? What if Techno was unstable as people whispered about? For many it was a joke. Crazy old Techno, scary as he was strange. Madness for sure, but harmless.

No one could know that when all was said and done, Techno stalked back to the southern squadron. No one would know of how he slumped against a tree, bracing against the rough bark as he fought with himself. No one would know how badly it hurt to chain something so sharp and volatile to the confines of his head. No one would know how his skull felt like splitting or how his nose bled in thin red tracks or how he had to bite his tongue to keep it from saying words he didn't speak.

And no one would ever know. Because those were Techno's problems, not theirs. They didn't need to know.

No one would know, and so no one would be afraid.

No one needed to know how his hands felt empty without a sword, how he felt like caving all their skulls in, how he had to hold himself back around every single person, fearful that one day, he might just slip. Black out, and find their neck limp and snapped in his hands.

No one needed to know how loudly chat cried in his head. Screams so loud he could hardly focus on anything else besides the cheer of 'encore!'

No one needed to know anything about him. There was nothing good to be found.

No one needed to know how much he suffered so they would not.

So they would not know. They would never know. And Techno liked it that way. Safe, controlled, contained,

alone.

—

Construction was finished at dawn. With remarkable speed the scouts had repaired the most egregious damages to the building, installed a lookout tower, and built the stables. It was a remarkable amount of work to have completed in only about eight hours.

With the threat of day no longer looming and four lookouts already stationed in the new tower, the Scouts relaxed with ease. Small fires were lit outside the building, scouts cramping around them as they shoveled food down their throats.

Techno glared down at the cream paper parcel in his hand. He picked at the wrapping, slowly pulling the paper away from what it concealed. He wrinkled his nose at the bar underneath. Hardtack. Also known as ship biscuits, also known as molar breakers, also known as *fucking disgusting*.

He picked at the biscuit, pulling off dry flakes of the stuff.

It was fine, he'd eaten this stuff before. Not that he enjoyed it, because it was bland and dry and gross and terrible and *awful* - Didn't matter. Point was he'd done it. In less strenuous circumstances than this one. He could do this.

Nervously he brought the bar of hardtack to his mouth and broke off a small chunk with his teeth. Despite his revulsion, he chewed the unleavened bread-

And spat it out.

No, nope, nah nah nah.

He stood sharply. There was no way in hell he was going to eat that shit. No. Just, no. He drew a knife from his boot and stalked off in the direction of the forest. The firelight faded as he moved, the warmth clinging to his back growing colder with each step. He was only able to reach the outskirts of camp before someone caught him.

"Uh- where are you going?" a slightly panicked voice asked.

Techno looked lazily over his shoulder. A scout recruit stood with her arm outstretched towards him. As his eyes slid over her, she jolted back with something akin to fear. Must not have known it was him.

"To get something to eat," Techno said.

"The wagon with the r-rations is t-that way," she said, pointing behind her, "I can help you find it if y-you need help finding-"

"Ah," he cut her off, "Nah. I'm gonna go grab something else."

"There's n-no food that way?"

He grinned languidly, shaking his knife so she saw it, "There is if you try hard enough."

She gulped nervously at the sight of the knife, but pressed on, "W-We were instructed to never leave camp at night."

"Never been one for rules," he dismissed, already walking away.

"But there are ti-titans," she squeaked, voice getting progressively quieter.

He kept walking, "Yep."

"They c-could kill you."

"That is indeed a possibility."

"You're not worried about that?!" She exclaimed.

He paused, "Nah," he said after a beat, "If anything, they should be worried about me."

Then Techno stepped forward, the last of the firelight fading from his back. Though the sound of his footsteps could be heard, the sound growing quieter with each step, he could no longer be seen. It almost looked like as he stepped forward, the night swallowed him whole. Only darkness was left where he once stood.

—

"Do you really hate hardtack that much," Though phrased like one, Levi was not asking a question.

Techno looked up, the leg of a wood pigeon clenched between two teeth. He ripped a chunk off, "Yes." Through the mouthful of food the word was slurred so it sounded more like 'yersh'.

"Enough to go against protocol and fuck off hunting for an hour?" Levi said, unamused, "In the middle of the night."

Techno swallowed his mouthful, a track of grease running down his chin, "Hey, at least it wasn't the middle of the day."

"Somehow, I don't believe that would stop you, fuckface."

"Why the hostility?" Techno took another large bite, "Jealous because you're stuck with field rations?"

Levi scowled, "Fuck off. At least I'm not such bitch that I won't eat them."

"Sounds like you're jelly," Techno sing-songed.

Levi glared.

"Here," Techno held out the other pigeon leg, "You don't have to suffer, poor child."

Levi continued to glower at him, the ration bar in his hand crumbling in his white knuckled grip.

"It's good," Techno waved it teasingly in his face, not earning any reaction besides growing contempt.

"Alright," Techno shrugged, pulling it away, "If you don't want it then I understand."

Levi snatched it from his hand, "Fuck you, Techno."

Techno just laughed.

—

"Blade you cannot leave camp whenever you want to go hunting."

"Of course, Sir."

"Then you recognized your wrongdoing?"

"Yes, Sir."

Erwin sighed, "You're going to do it again, aren't you?"

"Probably, Sir."

—

Techno pushed his weapons into Levi's hands, "Here."

Levi looked down at the bundle of bullshit he'd been handed. The weapons were wrapped in a soft piece of cloth, tied closed with a thick piece of twine. In the parcel every single weapon Techno owned was tucked safely away. And Levi meant every, single, one. From his sword and axe, to his hunting knives, to some exceptionally large sewing needles. Pretty much everything sharp that Techno had.

"The fuck is this?" Levi asked.

"I think we can both agree its better for me to not be armed when I'm asleep," Techno provided.

Levi clicked his tongue, picking at the bundle, "This is ridiculous," he said, pulling out a fish hook from the pile, "Seriously?"

Techno smiled awkwardly, "Okay but let's be honest, we both know I could find a way to kill someone with that."

Levi dropped the fish hook back into the pile, "You're not going to kill someone, Techno."

"Hopefully, yes. It would be ideal not to," Techno said, "But it's best to prepare for any occasion."

Levi frowned, "You survived three years *without* me to stop you. You'll be fine now. If things get bad, I'm here to stop you. You don't need to be afraid."

Techno frowned, glancing away, "The nightmares are getting worse, Levi. I'm losing what little control I had. Now that, that *thing,* is talking to me. I'm in over my head, and I worry that things are only going to get more dire."

He looked at Levi with such conviction that Levi could almost see it seeping from his features, coming off him like rays of moonlight, "Peregrine, I don't want anyone to get hurt because of *me.* The enemy is out there, it shouldn't be in here too. I don't want these people to be constantly looking over their shoulders because their comrade might turn and kill them at any moment. If that means taking precautions, then we're going to do it. No one needs to get hurt."

Levi clutched the bundle in his hands tighter, "Fine," he said, "But if I see you having a nightmare, I'm waking you up."

Techno opened his mouth, but Levi cut him off, "Don't even start with me. We've had this argument enough fucking times. So what if things are getting worse? I didn't abandon you back then, I certainly won't now. Do you fucking understand?"

After a moment, Techno nodded, "Okay. We'll do this together."

"Together," Levi emphasized, "None of your martyr shit."

"Together," Techno promised.

—

"I feel like I'm missing something," Techno said.

"You're missing many things," *The Blood God said, walking in front of his crumpled body. His sword dragged against the throne room floor, creating sparks against the quartz,* **"Friends, for one, family another, sanity, control, a sense of when to give up."**

His head twisted backwards as a bloodied fist met it. Techno spat, blood puddling onto the quartz.

"That's not what I'm talking about, asshole," he bit out, ignoring the flaring pain that was partially from the beating, partially chat screaming at him. Now, here in the dreamworld chat didn't seem to be confined to his skull. Instead, their voices bounced from the walls and whispered from the shadows.

"I feel like I'm missing something. Something important. A piece of myself. I feel hollow without it. The bitch of it is," he frowned, "I can't seem to remember what it is."

"A piece of your soul, perhaps," *the god said,* **"Something that once made you human. I must've discarded it to make room for myself."**

"No, that's not it," Techno dismissed, "I'm missing plenty of my soul but I don't feel incomplete without those parts. I just feel worse, but that's normal for me."

He looked at the god, red on black and white, "I'm forgetting something. Something important. And, I have the sneaking suspicion you have something to do with it."

Then all he knew was pain-

Techno blinked open his eyes. His mouth tasted of iron and his entire body felt like it had just been run over by a carriage. An arm was wound around his throat, constricting his airflow.

"Chokehold," he managed to wheeze out, "That's new."

The arm let go of him, "Oh thank fuck, you're done using the stupid voice," Levi said.

"The stupid voice?" Techno asked, rubbing his neck. Damn, even after the dream he could couldn't escape the fucking pain.

"When you go all, you know" Levi waved a hand in front of his eyes, "sometimes you start talking to yourself. Mumbling shit really. It sounds like you're talking with three voices at once."

"Ah," Techno said, remembering the Blood God talked, "That would be the guy in my head. He's talking now?"

"Not to me," Levi answered, "So I guess he's not fully conscious when he puppeteers your body."

"Not yet, anyway," Techno muttered.

"Hopefully never," Levi agreed.

"Are you hurt?" Techno asked, a touch of worry to his voice.

Levi scoffed, "Like that self proclaimed god could hurt me." he hid a bruised wrist behind his back.

Techno breathed a sigh of relief, "Thank gods. Or I guess don't thank them, cuz they tried to kill you."

A moment passed, "You know, you could technically say you fought god and won, and you wouldn't be incorrect."

Levi sighed.

—

 They left camp at the break of dawn.

They had a few hours of light before the titans came out in full. They needed to make the most out of it.

The Scouts rode in silence, both too tired to speak and not wanting to attract any titans. In the silence, it was easy for one's mind to wander. It didn't take much effort for Techno to spot the riderless horses or the blood on spring green capes.

No one talked about it.

His hands grew tighter on the reins. He would do better. Next time. He would save more people. He promised he would.

You'll never save anyone. A voice whispered.

Techno grit his teeth and ignored it.

—

Techno cut the tendons of a titan, letting it fall to the ground. Another scout swooped in and cut the nape off.

"Thanks for the assist!" Techno called over to them- and wait. He recognized that mop of long brown hair and look of constant panic.

"Hey! Luke!" He grinned brightly, even as he mounted Carl and galloped away from incoming titans, "It's good to see you. I see you survived yesterday!"

Luke rode up beside him, a wobbly smile on his face, "Y-Yeah. Sheer luck, but Ms. Petra gave me and the rest of the recruits some tips."

"Ah don't undersell yourself," Techno said, "You made it this far. That's got to count for something."

Luke's smile grew pained, "As pleasant as this conversation is, I think there are titans chasing us, and I would rather not die when they catch up."

Techno glanced back and lo, there were two titans lumbering after them. "Oh yeah," he said, turning swiftly on Carl.

"Try not to die!" He shouted at Luke as he rode straight at the monsters.

Luke huffed, exasperated, despite the dark situation, "what a weird guy."

—

The ride back went much more smoothly than the ride there. They got stuck in another altercation, but were able to continue on smoothly. They only lost one person.

It was a veteran. Someone Techno had never even talked to. He died saving a young recruit from a thirteen meter. He gave her time to run away.

By the time the Scouts staggered back to the walls it was already high noon. The garrison sat perched atop the wall, operating the cannons and fending off any approaching titans trying to slip through the walls with the Scouts. On the ground, the green cloaked soldiers did their best to hurry through the stone gates. They didn't want to spend another second in titan territory. Not after the last day and a half.

Techno tugged his hood up, staring at the last slivers of open prairie as the gate closed behind them. The stone doors locked together with a shudder that Techno could feel in his bones.

He turned to face what awaited them within the walls. Crowds and crowds of people. If Techno thought their sendoff was something, their reception completely crushed that idea.

There were whistles and cheers, mixed in with boos and words of scorn. In the front rows that stood in the street, Techno could pick out the faces of those mourning. Or awaiting to mourn. These

people he saw were parents, wives, husbands, family. Their faces were all withered the same way. Worry chipping into their features and sculpting out something only trained eye could find.

They didn't know if they would see their loved ones again.

Now they're finding out if they will.

Techno watched as Scouts jumped from their horses and rushed into open arms. He watched as parents search the caravan for their children. He watched as people broke from the crowd and pushed their way through the scouts in order to find their loved one.

He watched as realizations dawned on some. He watched when tears fell from withered faces as their arms remained empty.

And he felt guilt.

"We'll be stuck here for a bit," Levi whispered to him, "Some of the Scouts take the time to talk to their family. Or families to make sure that they're safe. We'll be moving again in about ten minutes. Just keep your head down."

Techno nodded, keeping his eyes low, the cloak obscuring all his features besides the deep scowl he wore.

A mother broke down by the side of the street. A green, bloodsoaked cloak was clutched between her hands. Her wails are loud enough to cut through the noise of Trost.

"You can't save all of them," Levi said.

Techno kept his head down, eyes fixed on his hands. He does not watch as more and more families are broken. He looked strictly down, and tuned out the screams.

—

When they got back they did an official headcount. The Scouts held their heads high, but they let the tears fall. Erwin stood at the front, running through the list of names he carried with him. When a name was called, and silence followed, he only marked it down and moved on.

At the end, they carved the missing names into the side of the building. So many names were already on the wall, and seven more joined it that day.

"It's how we remember them," Levi explained, "We can't take bodies back. So we carry their names with us. The previous HQ, out in Maria, had hundreds of names on the wall. So many you couldn't even count. Now they're lost out there, forgotten, like we promised they wouldn't be."

Techno stood beneath the wall. With his sword, he carved in tally marks. One for every skeleton or body he'd seen when he was trapped outside the walls. They were not names. But they were memories.

Techno had not yet forgotten them.

—

They celebrated that night.

The Scouts had pooled their money to rent out a tavern for the day, and partied and drank long into the night. It was a 'thank fuck we aren't dead' kind of party. One where people got black out drunk, tried to forget the last two days, and celebrated the fact that they were currently not being digested by a giant man monster.

Or technically not being digested? Kind of just sitting there. Titans couldn't digest shit. They just hacked it back up after a while, which begged the question of why even eat in the first place-

Didn't matter. Point was, party.

Music filled the room, loud and upbeat. A scout by the name of Rosa Harris took charge of that particular aspect, playing her fiddle brightly as she danced across the room. She coaxed song requests from the crowd with a grin, playing every song that was named. She knew them all.

The bar was full of singing to a song Techno couldn't quite place. He'd never heard a single song she'd played before. They just didn't exist in his world.

The drinking songs he knew were ones like 'Netherite Man' 'Skeleton's Fallin' in Love' and 'Ender Dragon's Drinking Again'. He couldn't place a single line the Scouts were singing. They were all unfamiliar to him.

Right now the Scouts were drunkenly swaying their way through a rendition of what Levi told him was 'No Place for a Scout'.

The fields are endless

The days are warm

There's food and water

It's safe from harm

It's perfect and lovely

So beautiful too

And the sky stretches onward

Bright and blue

And I know its heaven

Some say that it's paradise-

The note was held out, then left at a dramatic pause where even the violin fell silent.

The Scouts grinned and jumped back in.

I just don't think it's that nice!

Yes I'm a Scout!

Call me foolish or brave

Yes I'm a Scout!

And I'll die someday!

Yes I'm a Scout!

And I'm strange so they say,

But I'm a Scout!

Confines aren't my cage!

Well the walls are quite nice

And they're lovely, sure

But I find myself lacking

In adventure

Walls are place for the sane

They are place for the meek

But I find myself brave

It is danger I seek

So I pack up and leave

For you see I perceive

That as great and as good as these things can be-

It's just not place for me!

Yes I'm a Scout!

Call me foolish or brave

Yes I'm a Scout!

And I'll die someday!

Yes I'm a Scout!

And I'm strange so they say,

But I'm a Scout!

And there's one thing I'll claim

That as perfect as as paradise is

That as lovely it can be

That it's just not quite right

You its bad can't you see

And I'll scream and I'll shout

That it's not right for me

Because if safe and sane is what is about

Then it's easy to see-

The entire tavern shouted the last line. Even including Levi, who stopped nursing his drink moodily long enough to deliver the ending remark.

It's no place for a Scout!

Raucous cheers went up, and Rosa took a deep bow. Requests filled the air and Rosa was left to fend for herself as she was drowned under the sea of voices.

"I didn't know Scouts had their own drinking songs," Techno said to Levi, taking a sip from his own drink.

"We have a lot," Levi answered, "That one was actually a song written in mockery of the Scouts. A couple of soldiers thought it was funny, reworked the lyrics, and we've been singing it ever since. It's one of the oldest songs we have."

"In mockery of the Scouts?"

Levi gave him a dead eyed look, "The original Chorus was *'Yes I'm a Scout, I'm as fragile as glass. Yes I'm a Scout, can't tell my head from my ass.'*"

Techno laughed, "People really hate you that much eh?"

"Not as much nowadays. What with an actual objective beyond 'find out what's beyond the walls' and 'free humanity' people like us a bit more. Now they think we might actually fucking reclaim Maria."

"I'm sure there will be drinking songs written about that too."

"Don't even get me started," Levi rubbed his temple, "If we actually manage that then these fuckers will never stop singing about it. They'll take any little win they get and turn it into a fucking drinking song."

"There can't be *that* many."

Levi just stared at him, "Brat, between making fun of the MPs and gassing themselves up, the Scouts have hundreds of drinking songs. When they're not fighting, dying, or preparing to do so, they're drinking."

"Favorite song?"

Levi snorted, " *'Well I've Lost My Eyebrows'* Song about a titan who lost his eyebrows, and thought Erwin stole them from him."

Techno chuckled, "I need to hear that one."

"You will, by the end of the night. Hange will try to get it in before Erwin leaves."

"And you're least favorite song."

"Any of the one's about me," Levi said, "They all fucking suck. If I have to hear *'Humanity's Littlest Soldier'* one more time I'm breaking someone's goddess damn knees."

Techno frowned, "What are you talking about? That sounds amazing."

Levi shot him a warning glare, "Techno,"

He smiled, "What? I'm not going to request it. Friends don't do that to one another. That's just rude."

"I will murder you."

"Only if you can catch me first."

He sprinted off in the direction of Rosa. He had a song to hear tonight, and by Gods, he was going to make it happen. Even if Levi killed him for it.

If Levi gave him the cold shoulder the rest of the evening, well, that was just collateral.

—

In the days after the expedition the Scouts grieved and tried to move on. A lot of the grief was covered in joviality. Scouts bragged about their raised kill counts, celebrated their success getting home with booze, booze and more booze, and generally kept up the good cheer. Underneath it all

though was that sadness they'd felt while carving names into the walls. Some were able to cope better than others. Either they didn't know the deceased well, or they were able to shove the grief away. Some couldn't handle it as well-

A scream tore through the night.

-Some had nightmares.

A young woman trembled in her bed. Her body shook and shivered and she clutched her arms around herself tighter with every sob that wracked its way through her.

"They-they're gone," she sobbed into Techno's chest, "They're really gone."

He rubbed her back, offering only steady silence.

"I'm never going to see them again." she cried, "I'm never going to see my brother again."

Techno held her, unable to do anything else to help her.

She just sobbed and screamed. He let her.

The nights passed like that. For once, he helped others with their nightmares. Never once did he say a word. There was nothing he could say to make it better. In many ways they never would be better. They would just learn to cope with the pain. He never spoke to them, never said 'it'll be okay'.

But he always stayed by those who cried long into the night. He only left when they could fall back asleep. He was always there, when they grieved.

Techno never mentioned it in the morning. In many ways it was like it never happened. But he was always there again when a Scout cried out at night. He was always there to soothe the wound, in any small way he could.

—

A hand tapped gently on his shoulder, interrupting Techno while he was eating.

Breakfast had been a quiet affair that morning. Levi, Erwin, and Hange were caught up in budget meetings and damage assessments. Technoblade had been grateful that he'd yet to be roped into that aspect of the Scouts. His time heading the kingdom and army of the Empire had left him with a heavy distaste for *budget meetings.*

He'd sat himself in the corner of the dining hall. Without Levi or Hange to talk to, it seemed better to just sequester himself to the edges of the group. Techno had expected the morning to pass slowly and quietly. He'd eat without a word and leave.

Apparently someone had other ideas.

"What is it?" He growled, still picking at his bowl of gruel. The young man -he couldn't be more than sixteen. Prime, the military recruited young- before him startled at his tone, looking unsure of himself.

"I uh," he stumbled, "My name is Axel Kraufman, Sir. A couple of my friends were hoping to train today. Practice some hand to hand and moves on the ODM gear."

"Expedition left you shaken up, huh?" He quipped.

"Yes, sir." They glanced away, "I- We all saw our friends die. We didn't know," His eyes took on a haunted look. His lips shook as he tried to find the right words. Something that could explain what he'd experienced, "We didn't know it would be like *that.* "

"I see," Techno said softly, but he still regarded Axel with cold suspicion, "but what does this have to do with me?"

"Out there no one could touch you!" Axel exclaimed, "Not a single titan got close to hurting you. The only other person who could claim that is the Captain!"

"Why not ask Levi?" Techno protested, "Surely he would be more… pleasant."

Axel stared at him, appalled, "Sir, have you met the Captain?"

Techno snorted, "Yeah, I guess he can be pretty abrasive, but," he gestured to himself, "he's not, uh, me."

"With all due respect Sir, you may be, for a lack of a better word, strange, but Captain Levi is downright terrifying."

Techno felt genuinely confused, "Why me specifically though. You could ask Petra or Eld, or heck even Oulo."

"Luke recommended you," Axel fidgeted, "Will you do it?"

Techno blinked, considering it. What was the worst that could happen? If he ended up scaring them or something, he'd only be right where he was before he accepted the offer. His reputation was shit already. You couldn't lose anything if you didn't have it in the first place. He only had things to gain.

Plus, "Eh, I've got nothing better to do," he shrugged, "But I've been told I'm a bit of a harsh coach."

Memories of beating Eren into the ground during hand to hand arose. Ahh, good times.

Axel glowed, "Thank you, Sir!"

Techno made a face, "And yeah, you're gonna have to drop the sir thing. It's weird. No one's called me that for the last couple decades."

"Of course, sir."

"I hate this fucking place."

…

"FUCK OFF CHAT!"

—

Techno stood over a pile of groaning Scouts and bruised egos.

He dusted his hands off, flicking dirt -and what was probably a bit of blood- from the cuff of his sleeve. He looked down at the group currently lying on the floor. The training grounds consisted of areas of dry, packed dirt behind the bunkhouse. Naturally, the ground wasn't very soft. And yet, these Scouts curled into it like it was the softest thing they'd ever known.

"I'm going to be really honest with all of you," he toed through the pile of people, "you suck."

A scout groaned.

Techno took it as a retort, "No, I'm serious. Half the people in the 104th could kick your butt."

He looked over them and found himself entirely disappointed with the group of soldiers. There were five of them, and they'd hardly lasted two minutes against him in the fight. And like forty seconds of that was from Luke Cis alone. The kid was playing it safe and going hard on defense, trying to keep Techno from advancing or moving. He was just trying to stay in the fight as long as he could. Luke knew he wasn't going to win. Techno liked him. He was smart. Smart but timid. That was okay, they could work on that.

The rest of them sucked.

"Yeah," he grimaced down at them, "You're gonna need a *lot* of work."

—

Months passed quickly after that. Techno fell back into the rhythm he'd had before the expedition. He spent most of his day helping out anyone who needed it. Lifting something heavy, helping Moblit and Hange with experiments, running supply errands.

When he had free time he took to training the newer soldiers. Drilling them ruthlessly in hand to hand and sword play. He found he was absolutely terrible at teaching them the basic aerial formations he'd learned in boot camp. He knew the basics, but just that. Techno simply found the formations restrictive, and failed to teach the kids how to improvise.

So Techno did what he *was* good at. He taught them battle instincts.

They played simple games like tag, with everyone vs him, and ran obstacle courses that he changed between every single run. Nothing was every the same, and he always acted as unpredictable as he could be. Soon, his labors bore fruit.

Two months in, he could finally see the kids shaking off their constrictive mindset of following strict formations and predictable attack patterns. They could finally adapt - however bad they still were at it- to new challenges and unpredictable changes.

Only five out of nine of the initial recruits had survived the expedition. And that was a *good* percentage for the Scouts.

He wasn't going to let the remaining three die either. He was determined to see that through. And, it seemed the three of them weren't keen on dying either.

After every training session, when he was standing over their bruised bodies, he'd ask, "Are you sure you want to keep doing this?"

And every time, though their chests heaved and they were drenched head to toe in sweat, they'd reply, "Of course, Sir."

He huffed. Gods damn *sir.*

—

Techno glared at Hange.

"You don't have to be so upset about it," they said, grinning.

He continued to glare at her, glancing down at the needle currently stuck in his arm. Hange held it gently, almost reverently in their hands as they drew his blood. The little vial filled up slowly with poppy red, until it was completely full and the mad scientist drew it away.

"You could've asked," He groused, "You didn't have to ambush me."

"If I'd have asked, would you have said yes?"

"No."

"So ambush it was."

—

Techno looked out over the training fields. A couple of Scouts were training in hand to hand, maybe twenty of them partnered up to spar. Techno was hiding in the shade from the building, leaning back on the wall. He watched the training Scouts with a keen eye. To his pleasure, the five he'd taken to training were holding up well against the older veteran soldiers. The other Scouts had

noticed it too. It would be hard not to, what with Cis on a five time winning streak and the others keeping up just as well.

Techno grimaced as something caught his eye, "Cis!" He snapped, "pay attention to your footwork! I've told you fifty times to stop flopping around like a wet noodle!"

Luke stood a little straighter, and evened out his unstable stance, "Yes Sir!"

"Drop the 'sir'!" He shouted after the kid. Techno caught the bastard smirking. Smug freakin' kid.

He turned his attention back to the rest of the Scouts, creating a mental catalog of things they needed to work on. Incorporating kicks, takedowns and holds would benefit them. They were still too predictable. Luke needed to be more confident, and Axel needed to stop overextending his arm with every swing. He kept leaving himself open. Dream had that same problem, when he got upset, and Techno had learned to exploit that slight opening. It was a dangerous weakness to have.

Luke stumbled backwards, rapidly losing ground against his opponent.

"What did I just say about footwork!" Techno shouted. He shook his head. Kid needed to work on that. He was going to trip and fall on his own blade one of these days.

Petra walked up to him, coming from the edge of the training field, "You're good with them," she said, smiling gently, "The younger ones."

Techno shrugged, "Eh, I've just been helping them out a bit."

"That's not something everyone does," Petra pointed out.

He looked at her, red eyes dark as blood in the dim light, "I was just the one they asked. Anyone would have done the same if asked."

Petra snorted, "Levi would have told them to fuck off," she grinned, "and you know what he'd probably do after?"

"Humor me."

She poked him, "He'd tell them to ask you."

"Because he likes pushing his work onto me," Techno said.

"Because he knows that you'd be good at it," she corrected.

"I'm good at training them, I guess," he said. He wasn't going to lie about that.

"You're good at teaching them," Petra confirmed, her eyes sliding over to Luke, who was giving a veteran a hand up off the ground, "Plus, I think that they like you too."

Techno raised an eyebrow, "I pummel them into the ground every time we train."

"And then you teach them how to avoid it next time."

"Look at me Petra," he said, "They don't like me. They just know I can help them."

"Is it so unbelievable to think they might though?" She asked, "Once you get past . . . *all of this,*" she gestured to all of him, " you're actually a pretty nice guy. Not bad conversation, either."

She patted him on the shoulder, "Just think about it. A lot of the soldiers are warming up to you, and dare I say it, might even like you now. You just won't let yourself see it."

With that she walked away, leaving Techno alone with nothing but himself and a multitude of revelations he needed to think out. The Scouts might actually like him? Or at the very least tolerate

his presence. He would have thought that after the expedition they would have been *more* adverse to him. What with the crazed laughing and all that jazz. That tended to make people more weary, not less.

But part of him wanted to trust Petra. She didn't seem like the type to lie to someone.

"Huh," he said, smartly.

It was a lot to think about.

—

Now that he was paying attention, he realized that Petra might just be correct.

The stares had not abated. That remained the same. People watched him. From when he breezed through the dining hall, to when he stalked at the edges of the training grounds. He could feel the eyes on him.

But it felt different. He didn't know how to describe it. The stares before had felt like an itch on his skin, like a gross crawling feeling all down his arms and back. Now though, it just felt. . . warm.

It was less suspicion and fear and more like- like curiosity. Yes, curiosity, if he had to pick a word. It wasn't trust or acceptance, far from it. But it wasn't scorn.

Something had changed.

And for the life of him, he couldn't figure out why.

—

Techno barged into Levi's room.

"Peregrine, I would usually consider myself an intelligent man, but I can't figure something out," he announced, "I need your help."

Levi looked up from the book he was reading, "I wouldn't usually consider you an intelligent man, but I'll help nonetheless."

Techno paced across the floor, brow furrowed in concentration, "The other day Petra may have mentioned something about the Scouts warming up to me, and it confused me because, no they haven't." he rushed through the story, words spilling out faster and faster, "No one really talks to me besides you, Moblit, Hange, and a couple of kids. That doesn't sound like they like me. Unless that's what you would call 'warming up to someone' in the Scouts. I honestly don't know-"

Levi cut him off, "Brat, I caught none of that."

Techno ground to a halt, pausing for a second before asking, "Would you say I'm off putting, Levi?"

Levi flipped a page in his book, "certainly an acquired taste. You can be a dick, dismissive, dumb, and really fucking annoying sometimes. Most times."

"Right, that's what I thought," Techno nodded along, "not to mention the 'murderer' vibe. Which begs the question of why the Scouts have shifted their attitude towards me."

Levi frowned at him, "What do you mean shifted their attitude. Were they rude to you?"

"Not openly," Techno dismissed, "not important. The point is, they're not anymore and I'm not sure why."

Levi sighed, "Remember what I said about being fucking stupid? This is that."

"I don't get it."

"Of course you don't," Levi sighed, "Techno, you spent your entire expedition trying to save as many people as you could. Sure, you were fucking weird about it, with all the deranged chanting and laughter, but you also saved a bunch of lives. Don't you think that's enough to make someone like you, or at least reconsider their opinion of you?"

"I guess?"

Levi scowled, "How the fuck have you managed to survive twelve thousand years with the social skills of a potato?"

Techno put his hands on his hip, "Hey, don't use comparing someone to a potato as an insult. Potatoes are great. I like them more than most people I know."

Levi just glared at him, "Get the fuck out of my room."

—

Techno walked into the dining room. It was late at night, and dinner had long passed, but he could still hear noise coming from the room. It was sweet laughter and bright shouts. There was only the soft yellow glow of lantern light, bathing the room in copper tones. Even in the dim light, Techno could see figures moving and gesturing animatedly.

There was a small group of people, crowded in the corner of the room around a table. Their voices were loud in the otherwise quiet room, and brought more light to the place than any of the candles or lanterns did.

"Come on deal faster."

"Do you want to do this?"

A laugh, "Sure, if it's going to take this long!"

"Please don't let him deal, he'll make it take an hour."

"Hey! I'm right here you know!"

"Hold up, she's almost done. Stop being impatient."

Techno moved towards the group. He'd hoped to come off as confident, but in reality he was just shuffling over awkwardly.

The voices grew quieter as he approached and Techno watched as their eyes left the table and landed on him.

Techno shifted from foot to foot, "uh, do you mind if I join?"

One of them - a man with dirty blond hair- recovered first from the shock and smiled, "Do you know how to play?"

"Probably," Techno said, "What game is it?"

"Rummy."

"Ah, I know that one," Techno pulled up a chair, "Though I'm not sure how good I am at it."

The blond haired man laughed, "No worries! It'll make it easier for me to win! Hey Pigeon," he turned to a woman with a black bob, who was currently dealing, "you might actually come in somewhere other than last place!"

Pigeon -apparently- dealt out the last card and scowled, "Piss off."

"Your name is Pigeon?" Techno asked, picking up his cards.

"No-" she said just as the blond guy said, "Pretty much!"

She glared at him, "Don't you dare."

The blond guy ignored her, "She got hit in the face with a pigeon on her first expedition-"

"Shut. Up."

"-and on her second, she got hit with another!"

Pigeon punched him on the arm, "I hate you." The rest of the group broke out into laughter, deciding to air out all the dumb things that the Blond guy had done. Something about flying smack dab into a titan and falling asleep during ODM training at base camp and Shadis ripping him a new one.

Pigeon sighed, looking at Technoblade, "Ridiculous, isn't it."

"Your name?"

"Well, this dumbass," she jabbed a thumb at the blond dude, "but mostly my name yeah."

"Eh, it's not too bad," Techno said, grinning, "It can't be more ridiculous than Technoblade."

She shot him a small smile, "That's true."

"Hey! Maybe we should actually play the game instead of ribbing on totally cool soldiers!" Blond guy jumped back in, looking frayed after fending off all the accusations and jokes directed towards him.

"I don't know," Pigeon said, "I was finding this pretty fun."

"Of course you would-"

"I mean when you are so. . .yourself, its hard not too."

"You bitch-"

"That's hypocritical."

"You've done it now! I'm going to crush you this game."

Techno smiled, and turned his attention to organizing his cards. The arguing continued into the background, loud and beautiful. It reminded him of dinner with the 104th, so bright, so incredible. He'd missed it. He thought he wouldn't ever have it back.

Maybe Petra was onto something.

—

Techno placed a new carving on his shelf. It was a golden eagle, with its wings spread wide as it soared through the air. It looked like it was completely at home in the air, like all it was meant to do was fly. Like it would never fall from the sky.

He adjusted it back into the line of carvings. It found its place besides a vulture with snapped wings. When they were next to each other, it looked like both were flying, even as the vulture had broken feathers.

Techno sat down in bed, pulling the covers over himself, a smile still gracings his lips. Small, but *there.*

As darkness claimed him, a single thought filled his mind.

Maybe things were finally looking up.

—

Levi startled from sleep, someone was in his room.

He snatched his knife out from underneath his pillow. Within a fraction of second, he launched forward with lethal force. The knife flew in a flash of metal, right at the figure sitting on the edge of his bed. The figure snatched it out of the air with ease, turning it in their hand to look at it.

"Techno?" He asked, "What are you doing in here?"

A dull sort of sound erupted from the silence. It sounded like a low buzzing, like a million voices whispering at once. The longer the silence stretched on, the louder the buzzing got.

Techno didn't answer his question. He just kept looking at the knife. Levi tried again, this time more concerned, "Techno?"

The figure smiled and turned to look at him. Irises as bright as the sun flickered to life in the dark night, **"Not quite."**

He knew that voice. Ice cold fear laced down his spine.

Levi moved to stand- he had to do something. To fight. He had survived the underground, the countless expeditions, the challenges life had thrown at him one after the other. He sure as hell

wasn't dying in his bed, killed by some bitch ass god. He needed to get to his feet, to get a weapon- but before he could, the *thing* had a blade to his throat.

"Tut, tut," it said, grinning, **"You wouldn't want this to be the end, would you? Besides, if you hurt me, you hurt your *precious* friend as well. This is his body."**

The knife moved just the barest bit away from his neck, **"Besides, I just want to talk to you."**

"Fuck you," Levi spat, his hands fisted into the sheets, clutching them with a white knuckle grip.

"Now, is that any way to speak to someone who holds your life in their hands?" the god cocked his head.

Levi sneered, but made no attempt to move.

"Good captain," they smiled, patting his cheek. It took everything Levi had not to bite off its fingers. **"I trust you know who I am."** it said.

"Yeah I know," Levi growled, "You're that self proclaimed god that lives in Techno's head."

"Self proclaimed? Oh no no no, not in the slightest." sunlight irises glowed in the darkness, like blistering gold, **"I can assure you that I am very much a real God."**

"What do you want?" he glared at the thing. His voice was rough and dark. He needed to find a way out of this situation.

"Like I said," it smiled, **"to talk."**

"Then get the fuck on with it, and spare us both this useless drabble."

"So crass," it wrinkled Techno's nose, **"You are quite an *interesting* person, Captain."**

Fingers walked their way up his chest, while the god continued in a bored tone, **"Bastard child from the underground, criminal, war hero, killer, soldier,"** the god locked eyes with him, **"and, most importantly, one of the last ties the most powerful being to ever grace your earth has to humanity. Between you and those brats, he's hanging on by a thread. A thread that's keeping him from slaughtering everything in sight."**

"Oh," Levi put on a mocking smile, "and I'm sure you hate that, don't you. That Techno can stop you from doing just that."

"Stop me?" it grimaced, **"Please, he's only prolonging the inevitable. *You,* are prolonging the inevitable. He keeps his sanity for *you."***

"You're an obstacle," the blood god summarized, leaning in close and whispering, **"An obstacle that must be eliminated."**

"Then why don't you just kill me?" Levi pressed forward onto the blade, a line of red spilling down his throat. His eyes held a challenge, one he knew the god wouldn't rise too.

"Technoblade is powerful. Powerful to stop me from doing so" it admitted. Rows of sharp teeth glittered in the night, ***"But not for long."***

The knife dug into his flesh, blood bubbling from underneath the blade. The pressure kept increasing, the pain growing in a white hot line on his skin. If it kept pushing it, Levi had no doubt he would die. For a moment, fear seized through his body with the thought that *the god wasn't going to stop.*

But, then the god pulled the knife away, blood still dripping from the edge. They smiled cruelly at him, gaze cold and hungry.

"I will leave you alive this time," it said, **"But be warned, captain. The next time we meet, blood will be split. Next time, I will deliver you to the arms of death."**

Then, those sunlight irises flickered back out, and like a puppet cut from strings, Techno's body collapsed onto his bed. Silence returned to the room, leaving the god's last remark ringing through the stillness.

Held in Techno's hand was a wooden eagle. Its wings were snapped off.

Chapter End Notes

DAYUUUUMN. Levi got got.

Techno: hey how yall-
Hange: *is hange*
Techno: AEeAAAEEA GET YO FUCKKING DOG BITCH
Levi: It don't bit
Tehcno: YES IT dO

Also techno took one look at the recruit mortality rate and was like "Nahhhh fam, dying is cringe." and raised it to literally above 50%

Oh and if some numbers don't add up then suck it up bc i changed them A FUKCING LOT. Im bad at math. Leave me alone

Again, if you didn't see the cool fanart, go look at it. (Its in the chap summary)

Right so Im really tired and want to go to sleep. I have school tomorrow.

Comment. Feedback are my motivation :D

Love y'all.

End Notes

Did I accidentally make techno op? Maybe. Do I care? Not at this point, no.

Techno: man I could really use some comfort
Chat: you have emotions? Cringe
Techno: …. Fuck you

Comment or something I don't know

Works inspired by this one

Please to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!